





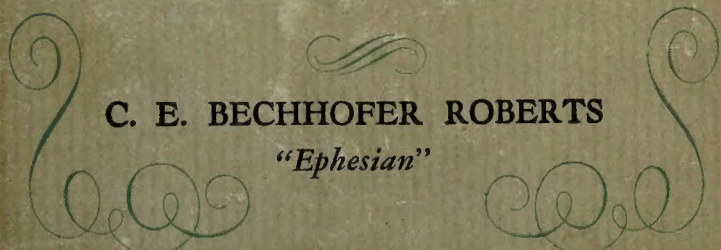
THIS SIDE IDOLATRY



A Novel Based on the
Life of Charles Dickens



C. E. BECHHOFFER ROBERTS
"Ephesian"



To father

Merry Xmas.

Ada.

THIS SIDE IDOLATRY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

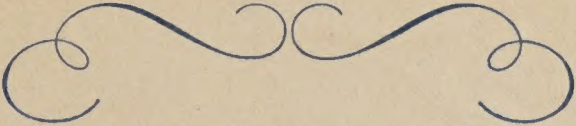
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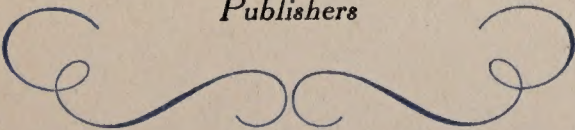
By

C. E. Bechhofer-Roberts
(“Ephesian”)

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To
The Duke of Sutherland

"If Nicholas be not always found to be blameless or agreeable, he is not always intended to appear so. He is a young man of an impetuous temper and of little or no experience; and I saw no reason why such a hero should be lifted out of nature."—Preface to NICHOLAS NICKLEBY.

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CHAPTER ONE

"THE inscrutable workings of Nature, gentlemen, have added an arrow to my quiver—a male arrow. Mrs. Dickens, I rejoice to state, is doing as well as can under the circumstances be expected. One more soul rapt from the skies—assuming that the celestial regions are indeed our habitat in the prenatal state—has taken on mortal flesh, which will, however, soon require supplementing by garments of a more prosaic texture, furnished not by Nature but out of my own inadequate resources. In short, I am the father of a son."

John Dickens hung up his hat, wiped his forehead and side-whiskers with a gaudy bandanna hankerchief, patted a bunch of charms on the watch-chain across his middle, coughed loudly and seated himself on a high stool at his desk.

It was a raw foggy February morning in 1812, and he was announcing the birth of the hero of this story to his fellow clerks in the Naval Pay Office at Portsmouth.

John was a man of robust but raffish appearance. So overwhelming was his manner that men who knew him well were astonished to realize that he was under, rather than over, middle height. A firm chin and eloquent lips were the best parts of a not unhandsome face, but a fleshy nose and watery blue eyes suggested a weakness of character, more reckless than courageous, more self-assured than self-controlled.

He could not concentrate his attention on his work this morning. He cut himself a quill and began to check the

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accounts of the frigate *Rosamond*, which had worked her way slowly into the harbor on the previous afternoon on her return from the West Indies. But the very first item—a stoppage of pay from one of the crew for a drunken misdemeanor during the voyage—reminded him with a pang that his own salary was effectively stopped for some time ahead for the payment of debts.

He had never been really solvent since, as a youth, he had run into his first extravagances. To pay one debt he had contracted another, until he was now hopelessly involved.

The fault was not wholly his own. His first playmates—in the castle at Tong in Shropshire and, later, at Crewe Hall—were young heirs and heiresses who flocked round his mother, the housekeeper, to hear the stories she told so well and with such a fund of mimicry. The good-natured widow had rejoiced to see him treated on equal terms with them, learning from the same governess and being dressed (at a reduced rate) by the same tailor. When, as he grew up, she found that he had acquired tastes far beyond her means, she bitterly reproached him, and, since he made no attempt to find work for himself, she used her patrons' influence to secure him a post.

So he had come to London, seven years before, as an extra clerk in the Naval Pay Office with a salary of five shillings a day. Two years later he was established as an assistant clerk at seventy pounds a year, with an allowance of two shillings for every day of attendance at the office. Such pay, with prospects of a regular increase and a regular pension at the end of his service, was very good for a housekeeper's son, but it was too little for John, who soon discovered that he could borrow money against his future salary.

He disdained the frugality of most of his colleagues at Somerset House, and cultivated the acquaintance of Thomas Barrow, a clerk whose pay was supplemented by a private allowance. John thought it politic to be on good terms with one whose family stood comparatively high in the social scale.

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Barrow's was a respected name at the Admiralty. His father, formerly a lieutenant in the Navy, was now a senior official, and a cousin, after a distinguished career in China and at the Cape, had been appointed Second Secretary.

John Dickens shared his friend's amusements, even his dissipations, although they were beyond his means. He visited his home and there fell in love with his sister Elizabeth. The Barrows disapproved the match, but at last consented to it, and the young couple were married at the church of St. Mary-le-Strand, immediately in front of Somerset House, where bridegroom, bride's father, her brother and cousin worked.

John was then twenty-three, his wife a few years younger. She was pretty, but vain and unpractical. They might have made a stir in the world had they the means to support their tastes, but John's debts, increased by a burst of expenditure at the wedding breakfast and on the honeymoon, demanded the most stringent economies. He was not sorry, therefore, to be transferred to Portsmouth, where life was cheaper.

Yet, though he took a modest house at Landport, a mile from the dockyard, he could not live on his salary and allowances, which now had risen to four pounds a week. A daughter, Fanny, was born a year after his marriage; and now, a year and a half later, a son followed Fanny into the world.

This very day a debt to one of his colleagues had fallen due. John, pushing aside his papers, pulled a few coins from his pocket and examined them ruefully. They were not enough. He turned to another neighbor and in vain tried to negotiate a loan. He frowned gloomily, smiled at a sudden thought of the baby, hummed a few bars of a catch, frowned once more, assumed a look of determined optimism, cut another quill and returned to his work.

A minute later, conscientious servant though he was of the Lordships of the Admiralty, he felt his own financial affairs more pressing than theirs. He jumped from his stool, hurried out of the room and, straightening his stock, tapped on the door of an adjacent office.

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A wizened old man sat within, his soiled neckerchief made dirtier by droppings of snuff. A senior clerk, he acted as paymaster and money-lender to his less provident colleagues.

"Well, Dickens, what is it now?" he snapped, as John entered.

"Congratulate me," exclaimed John. "Mrs. Dickens has deposited with me another pledge of our mutual affection. Such an event, as you are aware——"

"You want money to pay for your folly?" interrupted the old man.

"You take my meaning," answered John, "though I should not have expressed myself in exactly those terms."

"You can have ten pounds—not a penny more."

"My dear sir," said John, "consider the responsibilities of parentship; turn your mind for an instant to the helpless babe whose pecuniary needs cry aloud to your generosity! Make it fifteen!"

"If I do, I must stop twenty-five from your pay, and you already owe me——"

"Done!" cried John. "Not another word. I am a father; I immolate myself."

Fifteen sovereigns changed hands. A warrant was signed. John returned to his desk in high spirits, and the money-lender smiled too, as he thought of later usury on a still more profitable basis.

The father promptly repaid his other creditor, discharging the debt with the air of a prince bestowing a gift upon a courtier. Then, easy at heart, he waited impatiently for the morning's work to end. The figures on the papers danced before his eyes. The instant he was free to leave, he shouted "Hurrah!" reached down his hat, wrapped his muffler round his throat, donned a tight-waisted overcoat, rather shiny at the elbows, and rushed from the room.

On his way home from the dockyard, which he covered mostly at a run, he stopped to make purchases. He was so vague in his demands when he entered a toy-shop, that the

girl who served him wondered whether the toys he bought were for a boy or a girl, in the cradle or at school, or for a whole family of children of all ages.

He reached his home, a small two-storied house in a row of exactly similar houses. He passed through a tiny strip of unkempt garden and up half a dozen steps into a dark narrow hall. The buxom maid met him with a breathless tale of tradesmen who had called to demand payment of their accounts, but he strode majestically past her and mounted to the bedroom where Mrs. Dickens and the baby lay.

His wife was still pretty, though the strain of life with him had begun to tell. She gazed affectionately at him; all his follies could not extinguish her pride in his magnificent manner and florid eloquence. She realized that she had sacrificed comfort and ease to marry him, but she upheld him defiantly against the criticisms of her family.

He paraded the room, alternately congratulating her on her achievement, and the baby on a skilful entrance into the world. A couple of chops protruded from one of his pockets; a bottle of wine from another; a packet of tea spilled its contents on the floor from a third. In one hand he held a large pineapple and a bottle of Cologne water, and he flourished an enormous wooden Hussar in the other.

A slatternly old nurse, boiling a kettle over the fire, wiped her lips at the sight of the wine and reassured herself by a touch that her own bottle of gin was safe in one of the recesses of her voluminous skirts.

Mrs. Dickens' attention wandered from her husband's remarks, only a small proportion of which she was ever able to follow, and she smiled toward the baby at her side.

"A little green on top, I fear," she murmured.

"Our son, my love?" cried the agitated father.

"The pineapple," explained Mrs. Dickens, whose irrelevancy was a constant source of bewilderment to her husband.

John expressed his relief so uproariously that the nurse moved anxiously toward her patient, and the rubicund servant

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rushed up-stairs in alarm. John piled into her arms the chops, the Hussar, the port, the tea, the pineapple and the rest of his purchases. As soon as she had gone, he plunged his hand into his fob and displayed a handful of sovereigns.

While Mrs. Dickens expressed incoherent gratification, assuming that he had received the money as a gift from the Admiralty, his heart sank, for he realized that barely half of the original sum remained.

"I am unfitted, Elizabeth," he declared, "to defile this planet with my presence. I am an unworthy husband, a degraded spendthrift, a criminal wastrel. But take comfort! The matter is easily adjusted. A small flagon of poison, threepen'orth of opium or a reasonably sharp knife would solve the embarrassment and permit you to return to the bosom of your well-provided family, unencumbered by a discreditable spouse."

He laughed, kissed his wife, shook the baby affectionately within an inch of its life, and left the room to take his little daughter for a walk. Mrs. Dickens fell asleep.

Before the baby was a day older his parents began to discuss names for him. Mrs. Dickens proposed that he should be christened John after his father and Charles after hers, but her husband considered these names too commonplace. For days he was heard in the house, in the streets, even in the Pay Office, chanting combinations of names.

"Hector?" said his wife, to one of his proposals. "Is that altogether suitable? I remember we had a spaniel once with a short tail and one ear, and he bit a butcher whom we suspected of selling underweight, though I don't suppose this was the reason. Now I come to think of it, it was my brother he bit, and the butcher's boy used to give him bones, which we always thought stimulated his appetite for human flesh, like a heathen Hannibal."

"Do you mean, my love, that your dog answered to the name of Hector?" inquired John.

"The butcher was called Hector," she explained. "The dog's name was Fido, the same as the last Pope; or was the Pope called Pio? I really don't quite remember, but he was

famous for catching rats and eating them in the drawing-room in front of the fire."

In the end the distracted father was left with the miserable choice between "John Charles" or "Charles John." He carried his difficulty to Christopher Huffam, a contractor to the Admiralty, with whom he had scraped acquaintance.

He admired Huffam's wealth,—he was a rigger and mast-maker in a large way of business,—his good humor, and, above all, his intimacy with Prince William, the sailor Duke of Clarence. Had not the Duke offered Huffam a knighthood for rigging out a man-o'-war for Nelson in a single day, and had not the other refused the honor, preferring to remain a private citizen?

Huffam offered to stand godfather to the baby, and to give him his own name. John assented gratefully. To have such a godfather was nearly as good as being born rich; already John saw the baby made free of Huffam's Limehouse home, taken as a partner into his flourishing business, and becoming the boon companion of half the Royal Family.

Thus the problem of names was solved, and it was as Charles John Huffam that, to everybody's satisfaction, the boy was christened.

All his life Charles retained a few vivid memories of his babyhood days. He remembered tottering unsteadily across the floor to his beautiful mother. He remembered her holding him up to the window of the basement-kitchen in the house to which the family moved when he was a few months old. He remembered being carried to see a parade of soldiers, and leaving Portsmouth one morning in the snow, with one hand in his sister's, and in the other a favorite toy.

John had been transferred back to London, and Charles, at the age of two, made the first of his many journeys.

The short sojourn in London left no impression upon his mind. Another son, Alfred, was born and died. John was glad to be posted to Chatham, the Kentish town near the mouth of the Thames, and an important naval and military center. Here his expenses would be less, and he would receive an extra outport allowance of five shillings a day.

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His salary had now increased; but so had his family, with the birth of a second daughter, Letitia.

For a year they lived in lodgings in Chatham, but John itched to be master of his household, to command his own servants, to invite friends to take "the luck of the pot at my exiguous but not incommodious cot." His wife's sister, Mrs. Allen, the widow of a naval lieutenant, joined them, and John, with her financial assistance, immediately took a small house in Ordnance Terrace.

Still he ran into debt. He never received half his pay. Not only did he recklessly borrow money for himself, but he backed bills for casual acquaintances, who had not the slightest intention of fulfilling their obligations. He sank deeper and deeper into insolvency.

Charles was a delicate little boy, attacked periodically by painful spasms in his side, but handsome, blue-eyed, with brown curly hair, and alert and cheerful. To him his father was a whiskered god, whose radiant eloquence stretched his childish vocabulary with strange, long, fine-sounding words. Charles did not know the meaning of many of them, but, when he used them himself, even his elder sister Fanny thought her six-year-old brother amazingly accomplished.

Her admiration was shared by Mary Weller, the nurse, whose red cheeks and strong arms soon dissipated all memories of her predecessor at Portsmouth. She regarded Charles as the most wonderful child in the world, and showed her affection by telling him ghoulish stories of Bluebeard, who made puddings of his wives, and other fearsome individuals.

His playmates were the children next door, George and Lucy Stroughill. The boy was a little older than Charles, the girl a little younger. George was tall, strong and daring; he had the immeasurable advantage of living in a corner-house, with its wide outlook upon the world, and he was the acknowledged leader of all the little boys of the Terrace. Charles, though impatient of subordination, knew himself too weak to depose his neighbor and would have preferred to avoid him. But as this would deprive him of the company

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of blue-eyed, golden-haired Lucy, with whom he had fallen head over heels in love, he dissembled his envy.

Lucy treated her admirer after the manner of acknowledged beauties, urging him on by pretending to discourage him. Even the friendship which George displayed, did not wholly make up for the sister's coolness. Yet when Lucy celebrated her sixth birthday with a party, Charles found himself her guest of honor.

George called all the children to play at highwaymen, but Lucy and Charles slipped under the tea-table, where they sat on the floor, holding hands, eating cakes and sweets, and admiring her new blue sash. They were surprised by George who, without noticing their embarrassment, peremptorily summoned them to see his magic lantern.

Charles had seen it many times before, but now, with Lucy's warm and sticky hand in his, he found it transfigured by a new charm. The old man with the bulbous nose, who swallowed a fly and disgorged it again, seemed to regard him benevolently. The pictures of great ships in battle confirmed in his mind the thought that Chatham, home of many ships, was a paradise. Foreign views suggested long voyages undertaken with Lucy, whom in imagination he saved from such tropical dangers as tigers and pirates. When the chief and final wonder of George's collection was exhibited, and the Tower of London suddenly displayed lights at all its windows and loopholes, Charles felt the flames consume his heart.

Lost in these thoughts, he did not hear his parents request him to join Fanny in a duet. Understanding at last what was expected, he clambered on the table and, after one or two false starts, fixed his eyes on Lucy and sang to her alone.

The ballad was well suited to convey his feelings. It began with his singing, to Fanny's soft accompaniment on the piano:

“Long time I’ve courted you, miss;
But now I’m come from sea.
We’ll make no more ado, miss,
But quickly married be.”

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To this both he and Fanny added emphatically, "Whack-fol-de-rol-de-rido." Fanny then replied:

"I ne'er will wed a tar, sir,
Deceitful as yourself;
'Tis very plain you are, sir,
A good-for-nothing elf."

Charles gazed hard at Lucy to see if she believed the slander. Convinced that she did not, he sang the next verse:

"I ne'er deceived you yet, miss,
Though like a shrew you rave;
But prithee scold and fret, miss—
A storm I well can brave."

Several more verses ended the song to the satisfaction of both the imaginary and the real lovers.

After due applause, in which he proudly noticed that Lucy joined, Charles was commanded by his father to recite a poem which he had learned:

"'Tis the voice of the sluggard;
I hear him complain,
You have waked me too soon,
I must slumber again! . . ."

John had coached him in the portrayal of the appropriate emotions. Charles yawned and stretched so naturally during his recital that the audience clapped delightedly, and, when they returned home, he begged his father to take him to a performance at the local theater.

He was overheard by Doctor Lamert, an army surgeon attached to the neighboring Ordnance Hospital. This fat, lively little widower was a constant visitor to the Dickens' house.

"Why does he come here so often?" Charles once inquired.

"Hush," replied Mrs. Dickens, with a warning glance toward Mrs. Allen, his aunt.

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The doctor now invited him to the theater next evening. "Good play," he cried, in his habitual staccato style, "traveling company—Shakespeare—immortal bard—entertaining, instructive—very. If Mrs. Allen will deign—my son James can come—take Charles too—Swan of Avon—delightful evening—very."

The play was *Richard III*. They sat in a stage box, Doctor Lamert and Mrs. Allen together at the back, Charles and James Lamert, eight years his senior, leaning over the front. When Richard fought with Richmond and was forced against the box in the duel, Charles shrank back with terror, which was increased when Richmond killed the king.

It took his host and Mrs. Allen some time to comfort him: "Bless the boy—too emotional—Swan would be flattered—only a show—Richard up again and bowing—play again to-morrow."

When he understood the nature of the illusion, Charles became an ardent disciple of the stage. He and James Lamert rehearsed plays in a disused ward of the hospital and, in course of time, performed them at the Dickens' home, enlisting Fanny, Letty and the new baby, Harriet, in minor parts, while their parents, Mrs. Allen and Mary Weller, the nurse, formed the audience.

Mrs. Allen and Doctor Lamert took him also to see Grimaldi, the peerless clown. For weeks afterward he tried to imitate Grimaldi's shrill voice and his trick of dropping his hat and, every time he bent to pick it up, kicking it a few steps farther away.

"I foresee, my life," John commented to his wife, "that Charles has a natural inclination toward the buskin or the sawdust. He will grow up a Garrick or a Grimaldi, if not both."

The boy's talent as a singer and reciter opened the door to further delights. He went with his father to the Mitre Inn, where he sang for the pleasure of Mr. Tribe, the landlord, and was rewarded with a glass of wine and an invitation to spend a few days on a farm just outside Maidstone.

Mary Weller dressed him in his best clothes, packed a

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small carpetbag for him, and handed him over to Mr. Tribe. The latter drove him across country in a chaise, and they arrived at nightfall at a rambling, thatched farmhouse, inside which a log-fire lighted up the old chimney-seats and the oak beams of the ceiling.

After supper Charles was invited by his host to drink a glass of mulled ale, which sent him reeling up to a gabled, sweet-smelling bedroom. He tried to skate next morning on a frozen pond, and walked through the meadows in the clear frosty air, thrilled by the sound of distant church-bells. His enthusiasm on his return and his hints about another visit to Cob Tree Farm were so outspoken that Mr. Tribe would have been inhuman if he had not taken the eager little boy to the farm again.

John occasionally walked with his son through Chatham and its sister city, Rochester, commenting on the beauties and incidents of the landscape with the philosophic air of one for whose edification all had been arranged.

"The obese individual whom you observe reclining against that door-post," he would say, as Charles regarded with awe-struck eyes the famous fat boy of Rochester, "is, I understand, the offspring of the landlord of the adjoining hostelry. Master Budden is a sport of Nature, whose reputation has been noised even in the news-sheets of the Metropolis. He is credited with expending the major portion of his existence, not in diversions suited to his tender years, but in the poppy-perfumed arms of Morpheus. Our young friend's appetite is commensurate with his dimensions, a circumstance which was doubtless taken into consideration when Providence appointed him to be the son of an innkeeper."

John would saunter through the busy Chatham dockyard, noisy with the labor of blacksmiths and shipwrights, Charles trotting beside him. There they came upon a marching line of sullen men in drab ugly uniform, each with a large number sewn on his back and an iron ring round his right leg.

"Who are they?" asked Charles.

"Guests of His Majesty, my dear boy, who have been unable to refuse his hospitality. They are domiciled in the

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old hulk which, unless my eyes deceive me,—and I know of no reason why they should,—is moored in the harbor.”

“Why is that man with the gun watching them?”

“Lest they fall into the sin of ingratitude and run away.”

One day father and son made a long excursion to the top of Gad’s Hill, three miles away. When they arrived, John sat down outside the inn, the “Sir John Falstaff,” and over a pot of ale told Charles the story how, four hundred years ago, the fat, blustering, cowardly Falstaff had come to this very spot to rob a party of travelers and had run away in fright.

But the boy was staring at a handsome isolated house which he could see through the trees.

“Why don’t we live there, father?” he asked.

John Dickens explained that he much preferred their present home.

“I should like to live in that house,” Charles said.

“If, my son, as is my constant and unfailing hope, you acquire those habits of unremitting industry which I have sought to inculcate in you by my example, and if your professional duties require your presence in this locality, I see no reason why you should not, in the full course of time, pitch your tent beneath the shade of this delectable oasis.”

“I beg your pardon?” said the boy politely.

“I mean,” John explained, in one of the least circuitous sentences he ever uttered, “that if you work hard, you may be able to live here.”

Sometimes—rapturous days!—Charles persuaded Lucy to elude her brother George, and walk in the dockyard with him. She was not allowed to go to the theater, out of consideration for her sex, but she and Charles stole away to the open-air booth to watch the local sweeps celebrate the festival of their patron, St. Clement, with mumming and horse-play. The little boy explained the art of the drama to Lucy with a great show of knowledge.

“I am going to be an actor when I grow up,” he said, “like Grimaldi.”

In the mornings he did lessons with his mother, who, in

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the intervals between bringing children into the world, had taught him to read and write.

"Why can't I go to school like Fanny?" Charles asked her, when she was endeavoring, at her husband's request, to teach him the rudiments of Latin. "George says I ought to go."

"George may be right, but I fear you are not strong enough," she replied. "I certainly would not like you to go to a bad school, like the one in Yorkshire where that poor little boy up the Terrace went, and they cut open a boil on his neck with an inky penknife—or was it a wart and a chisel?"

"They wouldn't do that at the school where Fanny and George go. Lucy's going there too, this summer."

"I will speak to your father. He will know what is best for you, though I can not imagine why he thinks the study of Latin necessary. It isn't as if you were going to be a physician or an apocalypse, or even live in Italy, where it would be essential to know that a table is feminine and a verb irregular in its behavior."

Mrs. Dickens returned abruptly to the Latin primer and forgot Charles' request. He transferred it to his father, who decided that his son was now old and strong enough to accompany Fanny.

His first journey to the dame's school ended disastrously. The classroom was over a shop, and the little boy grazed his shins as he laboriously mounted the stairs. Fanny wiped her boots on a large iron scraper on the landing, but when Charles tried to do the same, his foot slipped over the scraper and he hurt his leg. He burst into tears and the alarmed Fanny brought him home, confirming Mrs. Dickens' suspicion that the rigors of education were too severe for him.

He begged so hard, however, to be allowed to go again that she gave way, though, whenever he looked paler than usual, he was kept at home.

Sunday-school, on the other hand, wearied him. He was led there every week, a reluctant worshiper, by his nurse and the pious Fanny.

"I am *not* a wicked sinner," he told his sister one afternoon when they returned home from Mary's favorite chapel.

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"Yes, you are, Charles. We are all wicked sinners; the minister said so."

"Father, are you a wicked sinner?" he asked John suddenly.

"More sinned against than sinning, my dear boy."

"Then why does Fanny say that your sins will be visited on us?"

"If Fanny is in the confidence of the Almighty," replied John, "it is not for me to contradict her statements. So far, however, as my financial shortcomings are concerned, I may relieve your mind with the assurance that you are not responsible in law for any debts which I incur."

One day, when his pains prevented his going to school, Charles rummaged in the spare attic next to his bedroom, and found a dusty hamper of books, among them *Robinson Crusoe*, *Don Quixote*, *Humphrey Clinker*, and the *Vicar of Wakefield*. Odd volumes of the *Spectator*, the *Tatler* and Mrs. Inchbald's collection of farces were among his booty, as well as the *Arabian Nights* and *Tales of the Genii*.

He pored over these treasures in secret, laboriously spelling out the hard words and astonishing his parents with inquiries about their meaning. Now he no longer hated the days when school was forbidden. He heard George and other boys at play in the fields beside the Terrace, but did not seek to join them. He found consolation in the books even for Lucy's coquetry. He pictured himself the hero of each book in turn. Sometimes he tilted at windmills with Don Quixote, sometimes discovered with horror the foot-print of Man Friday in the sand, sometimes rode home to his vicarage with his daughter Olivia perched on the pillion behind him. Every adventure was undertaken for love of Lucy, and he transferred it to the neighborhood of his home, until each object which he saw from his bedroom window held a new romantic significance.

To his dismay, many of the landmarks were destroyed when Chatham was swept by a fire. Charles spied the flames from his bedroom window and rushed down-stairs to tell his parents. He and John hurried off to watch the fire, and in

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the afternoon, when it had died out, he found his father writing.

"I am composing a graphic narrative of our disastrous matutinal conflagration for the columns of the *Times* newspaper," John explained. "A representative of that organ was pleased to entreat me to set down some personal impressions of the catastrophe, the initial progress of which he arrived too late to witness."

"Will it be in the newspaper?" asked Charles, incredulous.

"Assuredly, my dear boy. Unless I am much mistaken, it will afford the subscribers a piece of exquisite description such as the mere professional scribe rarely provides. Take, for example, my concluding passage,"—he selected a sheet of paper on which the ink was still wet,—"'It is a source of considerable satisfaction to the present writer to be enabled to testify, in concluding his relation of this melancholy holocaust, that the devouring forces of Nature, so incontinently loosed on a noble town, stopped short at depriving any individual in it of that Promethean spark which energizes his, or her, clay.'"

"What does that mean, father?"

"In less polished phraseology, my young friend, it signifies—well, that no lives were lost."

"Oughtn't you to say so?" the boy suggested. "People might not understand."

John looked severely at his son.

"My style is conceivably above your juvenile intelligence," he said, "but you will observe in to-morrow's sheet that such connoisseurs of the literary art as adorn the editorial sanctum of the *Times* will appreciate its excellences."

"I should write," insisted Charles, "that 'It is a satisfaction to state that no life was lost.'"

"That would be in the highest degree inelegant."

Father and son were agog with anticipation when the maid brought up the newspaper next afternoon. John snatched it, pointing proudly to a column on the second page where his account of the fire was printed. He began to declaim it, but soon lamented that it had been spoiled by the editors.

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Despite the pruning of its elegances, however, the essence of the original remained. Sublime, when recited by John, was his description how "the devouring element reached the Sun Tavern, a very extensive pile of building" and, "when this house caught fire, the scene was most awful, for the flames had now been driven by the violence of the wind to the opposite side of the street, which then presented to the eye a pile of burning buildings, between which, from the narrowness of the place, the passage was in some places impassable and in all extremely dangerous."

When he came to the last sentence, his voice failed him. He gazed from the newspaper to his son. Then he read out these words, "'It is, however, a satisfaction, in relating this melancholy accident, to be able to state that no life was lost on this occasion.'"

He stared at Charles again.

"One might almost suppose," he said, "that the editors of the *Times* harbor stylistic views not wholly dissimilar from your own. I congratulate you on your perspicacity, my dear boy, although I can not deny a preference for my own version of the calamity."

His father did not dwell on this incident when he read the account to his wife, and again in the evening to Mrs. Allen and Doctor Lamert, and many times thereafter to Charles or any one else who would listen. Both father and son came to know it by heart, and thought it the finest piece of description ever written.

This was the supreme moment of John's life. Not only was he proved a writer of distinction, but in the first excitement of his new dignity he subscribed two guineas, much more than he could afford, to a committee for the relief of families rendered homeless by the fire, whereupon he was offered an important share in its work. His fellow clerks smiled at his added self-importance, and the bubble was pricked when the news of his generosity brought demands for the payment of several old debts. By routine promotion his salary had increased to three hundred fifty pounds a year, with an additional ninety pounds as outpost allowance,

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but it was on the expectation of this rise that he had secured the loans which were now due for settlement.

He tided over the immediate crisis by more borrowing, and moved to a smaller house in a poor part of the town. For Charles the chief disadvantage of the change was that Lucy would be far away.

Near the new home was Mr. Giles' school, which Charles and Fanny attended, the boy in all the dignity of breeches and a white beaver hat. The other pupils were the master's younger brothers and sisters and a few children of officers of the garrison and of local tradesmen. Charles was by far the most alert, and Mr. Giles spent many evenings with him after the rest had gone home.

He had been at this school for two years, and was nearly eleven, when John was recalled to London. He could not go at once, for Mrs. Dickens was expecting to become a mother. When the baby was born, John set out by coach with his wife and all the children, except Charles. An orphan from the Chatham Workhouse accompanied them as servant, in place of Mary Weller, who was about to be married, and the furniture was sent to town by water.

Charles stayed behind with Mr. Giles, relishing the change from family routine. He was given the freedom of his master's library, and spent all his leisure there, to the contempt of the other boys. His seclusion was not purposeless, for he was engaged in a thrilling secret occupation.

One morning, when the lesson ended, Charles, with a triumphant glance at his curious fellows, walked to Mr Giles' desk and handed him a sheaf of papers, on the top sheet of which was written in large letters:

MISNAR, THE SULTAN OF INDIA *A TRAGEDY*

By

Charles John Huffam Dickens

An hour later, Mr. Giles called him down-stairs in an unusually grave voice. The boy entered the room, tremulous with anticipation.

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"Your tragedy is extremely promising, really remarkable for a boy of your years," said the schoolmaster. "I see that you have the making of a writer in you.—But this is not what I have to tell you. I have just received a letter from your father. You are going away——"

"Going away?" cried Charles.

"Your parents wish you to join them at once. Your father asks me to send you to London by to-morrow morning's coach."

"I—I am very happy here with you, sir," said Charles. "But it'll be fun to see Fanny again, and Letty and the babies."

Mr. Giles began to speak, thought better of it, and was silent.

Charles packed his scanty belongings in bewilderment. Why did his father and mother require him so urgently in London, instead of leaving him at school until the end of the term? But how proud they would be to know that he had written a tragedy which had won Mr. Giles' approval! How delighted Fanny and the other children would be to see him and hear his wonderful news!

Suddenly he remembered Lucy. He must say good-by to her and tell her too of his achievement.

Off he ran through the town to Ordnance Terrace. Miss Lucy was at home, said the maid.

"I've written a play, Lucy,—a *tragedy*," Charles announced breathlessly, "and Mr. Giles says it is very good. And I'm going away to London to-morrow."

Lucy's smile vanished.

"Going? For long?" she asked.

"Soon I shall be a great writer. Mr. Giles says so," he invented. Then, with a sudden impulse, "Come for a walk with me, as you used to do. I want to show you something."

They set off, holding hands in the old friendly manner. Charles wondered that he could ever have allowed himself to forget how he loved her.

"Where are we going?" she asked. "I have never been this way before."

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"This is Gad's Hill," Charles explained. "We shall soon be at the top."

He stopped at last at a garden wall. "Dear Lucy," he said, "I am going to London, but I shall come back here, and we'll be married and live in this house for ever and ever."

They swung on the gate together, and marveled at the size and beauty of the house. An odd sound made Charles look at her.

"You're crying," he exclaimed.

"You'll forget me," she sobbed.

"Never!" he vowed and made her dry her eyes and kiss him.

Then, very slowly, they descended the hill.

Mr. Giles took him next morning to the coach, Simpson's famous *Blue-Eyed Maid*. "Your father will be waiting for you at the Cross Keys Inn," he said. "Good-by, my dear fellow, and always remember our days at school together."

The horses started off at a canter. Charles, the only inside passenger, waved farewell to the schoolmaster and, munching a sandwich, gazed out of the window through the rain. He sought to ease his loneliness with visions of the future, first in London and then with dear Lucy in the great house on top of Gad's Hill. But as the coach rumbled along, her image paled and vanished before the radiance of Charles John Huffam Dickens of Gad's Hill, playwright, journalist.

The creaking of the coach, the rhythm of the horses' hoofs, the patter of rain on the windows, the shouts of the passers-by, the winding of the guard's horn—all seemed to the self-centered little boy a joyous fanfare proclaiming his destiny to an expectant world.

CHAPTER TWO

THE increasing noise and bustle, as the *Blue-Eyed Maid* neared its destination, filled Charles with delicious excitement.

The drizzling rain ceased when they came to the suburban villas and market-gardens of Deptford and Bermondsey. He lowered the window with a struggle and, holding fast, stood at the opening to gaze at the sights. The coach approached London Bridge and he looked down at the river near the lower reaches of which he had gathered so many of his early memories. But here the Thames was no spacious estuary; it was a greasy, malodorous highway, packed with a confusion of craft. Brigs, lighters, colliers, Dutch eel-boats and barges lay moored against the wharves; others rode in mid-stream, surrounded by a medley of skiffs which, like midges on a summer evening, darted to and fro, propelled by shouting, swearing, whistling watermen.

A minute later he entered the town.

The narrow stone-paved streets seemed incredibly animated and noisy. Charles gaped at shops and taverns, mysterious arches and alleys. He stared open-mouthed at a pair of dandies in swallow-tailed coats, delicate lace cuffs and Hessian boots, each with a gold-headed cane dangling from his wrist. A merchant, in black knee-breeches and white silk stockings, drove past in a cabriolet, side by side with the cabman. Sleek city gentlemen on horseback peered at the coach; others deftly tooled their carriages through the traffic, their footmen gazing contemptuously back at Charles.

A gang of workmen, conspicuous by their aprons and flaring neckerchiefs, jostled milder men into the deep noisome gutters. At their rowdy approach, a nurse hurried her charges indoors, and an alarmed lady—the finest lady Charles

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had ever seen, with her poke-bonnet, red pelisse and fur tippet—called her maid to cross the road, beckoning to a top-hatted crossing-sweeper, broom in hand, to escort them through the puddles.

The boy's eye darted from one strange sight to another—a knot of old-clo' Jews in gaberdines, fingering their beards as they chattered outside a junk-shop; a Hindu juggler; a footman in gorgeous livery; a drunkard staggering from a gin-palace arm in arm with a woman in cap and shawl; a lamplighter with his ladder and lantern; a Bow Street runner gripping a pickpocket by the scruff of his neck, while a slatternly drab yelled curses at both. He trembled for the limbs of the musicians, ballad-singers, beggars, flower-sellers, and scurrying newsboys with bundles of papers under their arms, as the wheels of the *Blue-Eyed Maid* skimmed past them.

Above the din he heard the cries of a hoarse-voiced auctioneer and a baked-potato man beside his steaming cans, a muffin-man's bell, and an oysterman bawling: "Three a penny! Three a penny!"

Some drunken sailors and an army officer, in plumed helmet and gold-frogged tunic, reminded Charles for a moment of Chatham. Then the bustle, the confusion, the medley of rich, poor and shabby-genteel, every kind of face exhibiting every kind of emotion—the whole tumultuous kaleidoscope of London whirled again before his eyes. Blinded, deafened, he contrasted Chatham—so dull, so empty, so puny—with this uproarious whirlpool of life.

Suddenly he realized his own insignificance. How could he hope to fulfill in this crowded, clamorous London the ambitions which had seemed so reasonable at the beginning of his journey?

The coach turned out of the stream of traffic under a low archway. The worst of the noise was cut off, and he heard the wheels rumble over the cobbles and the coachman call to an ostler. John, whose majesty not even London could wholly diminish, stood waiting beside the coffee-room door of the inn, and Charles could scarcely wait for the guard to

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let down the steps before he flung himself into his father's arms.

He noticed that his father wore black and seemed unusually restrained.

"Give me your parcel," John said, "and hold my hand. Come!"

Together they walked into the street.

"I have to impart a mournful item of information to you, my boy," said John, after they had gone a little way. "I regret to tell you that your little sister, Harriet, has shuffled off this mortal coil and returned to her own sphere, somewhere beyond the heavenly constellations. In other words, she died three days ago. I have sent for you to attend the obsequies."

A tear rolled down his cheek, and Charles wept without restraint. All his delight in London vanished.

They walked on in silence. The streets grew almost deserted, and, as darkness fell, father and son came to a row of mean houses.

John stopped before one which seemed dirtier and more neglected than the rest. "A poor habitation," he remarked, "but mine own. Man seeks but little here below, and is unlikely to find a more irreducible minimum than in Bayham Street, Camden Town. I am, however, in momentary expectation of a material improvement in my circumstances, upon which we shall remove to a more salubrious neighborhood."

He laughed at this pleasant thought, but, remembering his dead child, became sad again. He knocked at the door, which was opened by Fanny, pale and drawn. Charles embraced her silently, and, passing down a dim uncarpeted passage, found his mother in tears beside a little coffin which lay on the table in a cold bare room. She took him into her arms.

The lid of the coffin was lifted to show him the face of his sister, waxen in the candle-light. He kissed her, trembling,—for he had never seen death before,—and left the room as soon as he could.

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In the passage he came upon his father talking to a burly stranger.

"Them there's my pertikler instructions," the man declared, "v'ich I can't novise depart from them. And that's a fact."

"Charles, my boy," said John, "I am endeavoring to persuade our friend, who is at the moment a guest in our household, that a mattress is essential to your peaceful repose. He argues that a young person of your years might reasonably be expected to share a couch with your infant brother, but I fear that his unaccustomed proximity would militate against your enjoyment of Nature's choicest boon, refreshing sleep."

"Werry likely," interrupted the stranger, "but my dooty is to keep the property v'ere it is, ready and ticketed for the sale, and that's a fact. Howsomever, pröwiding the young shaver behaves hisself as a young shaver should, I'll vaive the point and let him have a mattress all to hisself."

John required Charles in a loud whisper to note that a good heart was not infrequently concealed beneath an unprepossessing exterior.

"Who is he, father?" Charles asked, as the man passed them as he went into the kitchen, where he could be heard stamping his feet and heaping coals on the fire.

"The incarnation of Nemesis, my boy, the outward and visible manifestation of the pecuniary perplexities with which I find myself at the moment embarrassed."

Still puzzled, Charles appealed to his mother.

"Your father," she explained, "has been called upon to meet a bill, which he exotically endorsed for a friend six months ago. Since your father can not pay, that dreadful man in the kitchen has been put into possession as a bill of sale."

Not yet wholly comprehending, Charles carried a piece of bread and cheese to the garret where his mattress had been placed on the floor. He was too exhausted not to fall asleep at once.

When he woke in the morning, the air seemed thick and

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heavy. The walls sweated damp, and a mouse was nibbling at the crumbs that he had dropped on the grimy floor-boards. He pushed open a little window and looked out upon a back yard in which a washerwoman was plying her trade; beyond lay a foggy expanse of fields which had lost their greenness and were pitted with ditches and heaps of bricks.

He found his father down-stairs, washing his face in the kitchen.

"It might conduce to a more adequate sense of to-day's solemn occasion," said John, drying his face, "if you were to apply yourself to the denigration of my boots. The aged female whom your mother recently engaged to minister to our culinary requirements, has turned a deliberately—or, as she avers, congenitally—deaf ear to my request to shine my boots. And our parentless dependent from Chatham Work-house is occupied with the babies."

Charles blacked his father's boots, and his mother's, and Fanny's and Letty's, and his own, while the brokers' man leaned against the door-post and said, in the intervals of stamping and clearing his throat, that it did his heart good to see a young shaver so hard-working.

Breakfast was a meager, cheerless meal, though John presided with the air of a Lord Mayor at a banquet. Soon afterward a boy in rusty black arrived with a push-cart, on which he laid the coffin, and the family followed it through the fog to the cemetery. After the funeral, John strode off to Somerset House and Charles returned to Bayham Street to take stock of his new circumstances.

His confident day-dreams had faded. In this mean house, shadowed by death and hunger, he was only a puzzled and frightened little boy. He missed the familiar surroundings, the friendly school and its master, the pleasant routine. The world seemed muddled, precarious and miserable.

The deaf woman cooked a barely eatable meal for the family, grumbling at the brokers' man who had made himself master of the kitchen. Afterward Mrs. Dickens and Fanny went out together, and left Charles in the care of the orphan maid. For a while he played with the babies, but he had no

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zest for games. Next he tried to read a book, but the gloom of the place overwhelmed him.

Forlorn and on the point of tears, he sought the brokers' man in the kitchen.

"Vell, young shaver," said that individual, lounging beside the fire in the most comfortable of John's chairs, "so you're a Cockney now, eh?"

"A what, sir?"

"Don't you know vot a Cockney is? A Cockney's a Lunnoner livin' vithin earshot o' Bow-bells, and that's a fact."

"Are you a Cockney, sir?"

"Yes an' then no," replied the brokers' man. "I live in Lunnon most of the time, but I often goes home to the country—Kennington's my cradle, and that's a fact. But I likes Lunnon vell enough. You'll like it too, you vill, v'en you knows it. Vait till your pa signs a deed and gets out of his trouble."

"A deed?" gasped Charles, whose mind leaped to the conclusion, based on the *Arabian Nights*, that it was an unholy compact with the Devil, sealed in blood.

"Vot else can he do?" asked the brokers' man. "It's his only vay out, and he'll be werry lucky if he finds the other party agreeable."

With this fresh terror in his mind, Charles heard the front door open and his parents enter the house. It happened that they were discussing the deed.

"I do not for one instant doubt, Elizabeth," John was saying, "that the deed will prove an open sesame to the alleviation of our present misfortunes."

"Are you sure that my family will not help?" asked Mrs. Dickens.

"I shall never forget the generosity with which your esteemed relatives rallied to my succor three years ago at Chatham," her husband replied. "Nor do I forget that they gave me plainly to understand that the offer could not be repeated. We can certainly summon them once again, but they will as certainly ignore the summons."

"You have seen Mr. Huffam?"

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"He asked me, my love, whether it is I or Charles—from whom, by the way, he solicits a visit—to whom he stands godfather. I admitted that I had no claim on him, and his reply led me to believe that, having run to my assistance so frequently in the past, he has wearied of that form of philanthropic athletics."

"Then there is nothing but the deed," sighed his wife.

"Nothing," declared John, assuming a heroic attitude.

Charles had heard enough. His father was determined to barter away his soul. There could be only one consequence of such a transaction: hell, he believed, yawned at his father's feet. Silently the little boy tiptoed to his attic and threw himself weeping on his mattress.

By midnight he was in a high fever; pains shot through his side. John sat beside him on a rickety old chair. He held the boy's hand, placed bottles of hot water against his tortured body, and comforted him with tender affection. At last Charles screwed up courage to inquire whether John was forced to sell his soul to the Devil.

"It had not occurred to me to do so," replied the astonished father. "My immortal principle, so far as its whereabouts are within my cognition, is not in the market."

"But the deed, father?"

"The deed?"

"You will sell your soul, and never be happy again."

The truth broke on John, and he smiled cheerfully at his son.

"Your concern, my dear boy, does you infinite credit. But it is misplaced. The deed that I contemplate is a mere accommodation with a mortal creditor—a devil only in a manner of speaking and some aspects of his behavior."

Reassured, Charles dropped into a fitful sleep. All through the next day his mother and Fanny watched by his mattress, and John made up a bed beside him for the night. On the following morning the boy was well enough to come down-stairs.

Then the days passed with dreadful monotony. He found that he had degenerated into a household drudge. His

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mother dismissed the deaf old woman, to save her wages, and the workhouse orphan was always busy with the babies. Charles lit the fire, polished the boots, swept the floors, helped to dispatch his father to the office and Fanny to her music lessons in Soho, and was sent to beg shopkeepers to extend further credit.

Soon a sale was held in the house and, when the greater part of the furniture had been taken away, the brokers' man went too, telling Charles that he hoped to meet him again, but not professionally. The boy was sorry at his departure, for he was at least a companion.

Food became scarcer, and Mrs. Dickens grew increasingly melancholy and incoherent. She was responsible, however, for providing a valuable addition to the family income. Her sister, Mrs. Allen, had married Doctor Lamert and gone to live with him in Ireland, but his son, James, who had just passed out of the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, remained in London to await a commission in the army. Mrs. Dickens persuaded him to lodge at Bayham Street. He was given the best room in the house, the furniture for which, hurriedly bought, was to be paid for out of his rent.

He had always liked Charles, and now he sought to distract the lonely boy by helping him to construct, decorate and organize a toy theater, in which they produced Charles' own tragedy, *Misnar*.

When James was otherwise occupied, Charles amused himself with long walks through the city. On fine days, as soon as his morning's labor ended, he set out toward St. Paul's, the dome of which he could see from the top of Bayham Street.

The London through which he rambled was small and compact. Most of its million and a half inhabitants lived north of the Thames; only Southwark, almost a separate town, lay on the south bank. Bayham Street lay on the fringe of the country, but Charles could reach the river in an hour. He needed barely twice that time to pass from the farms of Kensington to where, a little east of London Bridge, the marshes of rural Essex began.

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It was a city of surprising contrasts. He wandered into the grand new squares of Bloomsbury, gazing enviously at the children at play in the freshly planted gardens; five minutes later, he was splashing through the filthy lanes of Seven Dials. He stared into the doors of taverns, with their wooden tables and sanded floors, where crowds of diners—all men—called on the landlord to sing ballads to which they trolled the chorus. He stood on tiptoe to read the playbills outside a theater, and, turning a corner, found himself in a dark deserted alley, whence strange, almost inhuman voices sent him running for refuge to a noisy smithy. These walks fascinated him, and he did not return home till nightfall.

His mother noticed at last that the boy was suffering from want of companionship, if not also of food, and arranged for him to dine one Sunday with his godfather, Christopher Huffam, at Limehouse.

The way was not easy to find and the journey far, but Charles came eventually to a substantial house beside the river, surrounded by masts, some of them firmly fixed in vessels, the rest still in the work-yards. A neat maid opened the door and led him into a room where half a dozen men sat smoking.

One of them, stout and red-faced, who seemed half a merchant and half a sea-captain, greeted him heartily.

"Welcome, godson," he cried. "Here you are at last, what there is of you, my young shrimp. Bashful, are you? Then you're never your father's son. Bless the boy, you're in rags, but that's not your fault. Never mind shaking hands all round, godson. Food before frivolity, eh?"

They sat down to a better dinner than Charles had ever imagined. Half starved, he ate greedily.

"Not a bad hand with your knife and fork," commented Huffam genially, when the boy could eat no more. "Your father tells me that you sing a good song," he continued. "Give us a sample now. Sing hearty, and we'll all join in the chorus."

Charles was comatose with much eating and ashamed of his ragged jacket, but he mounted his chair obediently and

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broke into the song of the Cat's-meat Man, with its rousing chorus :

"Down in the street cries the cat's-meat man,
Fango, dango, with his barrow and can."

He illustrated the lines with such energetic nods and winks that, when he ended, one of the company, an East India captain, thumped the table and shouted, "Mr. Huffam, sir, that boy's a prodigy, damme if he ain't! A prodigy as ever was, a regular out an' outer."

"So he is," assented another, whose resemblance to his godfather had intrigued Charles all through dinner. "You should set him to the stage, Christopher."

"You're more the man to do that, brother," chuckled Huffam. "Your crony, Prince Will'am, knows the stage door of Drury Lane much better than I know the front door. His friends among the ladies there could soon set Charles up on the boards. They've got the influence, eh?"

"He chaffs me about the prince," complained the brother, "as if he weren't himself on the best of terms with him. Oh, Christopher, you did sadly not to take that knighthood he offered you."

"What should I do with a 'Sir' to my name these days," retorted Christopher, "when Jack is as good as his master? Now that the nineteenth century's of age, a title don't signify."

"The eighteenth isn't wholly in its grave yet," quietly interposed a guest who sat beside Charles.

"High time it was then, Doctor," cried Christopher. "We've seen French Boney penned up at St. Helena and now it's time our Boneys vanished. Reform's the cry to-day. Up North, in those new steam-engine factory towns, men are full of new money, aye, and new notions too. They don't know who their grandfathers were, but they'll drive out the old fogeys who know nothing else. Look how times are changing! When we were Charles' age, brother, men lived and died in the cottages where they were born. To-day they're all tramping to the towns."

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"It's those danged machines," growled the East India captain.

"Of course it is," continued Huffam. "How many machines were there in your young days, Captain? Not so many in all England as a pack of poor fools can smash in a day now up at Nottingham. What did we know of steam? To-day steam's changing the world. There's talk already of steam-engines hauling the trucks on the railroads—you'll see 'em yourself before you're much older. To say nothing of steamboats!"

"I'll never set foot aboard a steamboat," announced the sailor.

"Then your children will!"

"I haven't any children."

"You're o'er modest, Cap'n," retorted Huffam with a shout of laughter, "and did you ever think we'd live to see gas lamps on Westminster Bridge or eat under 'em with the Lord Mayor in the Guildhall?"

"Gas is ag'in' Nature," the captain insisted. "Only t'other day I heard as a parson committed his vestrymen for talking of putting gas in his church. Very proper too!"

"You're an old Tory," said Huffam. "You don't realize what goes on while you're away at sea. I'll wager you don't know that nearly half the folk in England to-day can sign their names with their own hand. How's that for progress?"

"You forget one thing, Christopher," put in the doctor. "London still has a gin-shop to every fifteen houses. Is that progress?"

"There you score," his host admitted. "But, despite that, folk are changing. Why, one of our workmen stole fifty pounds' worth of plate. I didn't want to prosecute, but I couldn't help myself. What do you think the jury did? They didn't wish to hang the poor devil, so they assessed the theft at four pounds nineteen and elevenpence. Made the judge cut up very rough. He talked of broken oaths and such, but they weren't frightened. Twenty years ago that man would have hung—and in chains as like as not. I call that real

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progress. You can't put a man in the pillory nowadays, either,—so my lawyer tells me,—except for perjury. The stocks have gone——”

“But the treadmill's come instead,” chuckled the doctor. “The machine age, eh?”

“There's one good novelty come ashore anyhow,” declared the captain. “That's cigars, and a rattling good brand you keep, Mr. Huffam, sir. I see'd a chart of rules for smoking 'em drawn up by some young literary cit. Not that I ever needed teaching, gen'l'men. It come natural to me.”

Huffam noticed that Charles was dozing.

“It's not fair of us to talk over your head, godson,” he said. “But one fact is sure. You've come to London at a good time; *you'll* see the world change, even if we old 'uns don't. Not if you sleep after dinner, though. You'd best be thinking of home. How do you go? What? On your little legs? You're not walking back to-day, my lad. I'll send you in a coach, to pay for your song, and do well by the bargain.”

Charles drove home proudly in a coach, clasping in his hand a bright new half-crown which his godfather had put there as a parting gift.

“Find your way here again soon, godson,” he had said, as he lifted the boy into the coach. “There's always a dinner for you here if you'll sing for it.”

Not without a thought of healing family breaches, Mrs. Dickens sent Charles also to visit her brother Thomas, the Admiralty clerk, who was laid up with a broken leg in Gerrard Street, Soho. His lodging was over Christie and Manson's bookshop and Charles stopped to gaze at the books displayed outside. He read a long list of attractive titles, and fingered a volume of Colman's farces in one of the boxes. No one seemed to observe him and he screwed up courage to glance at its pages. He read page after page, putting off the moment when he must lay it down and go up to his uncle.

Suddenly a hand grasped his shoulder.

“Caught you, my young rascal, have I?” said a severe

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voice. "D'you think I leave my books out here for ragged young ne'er-do-wells? What d'you mean by it?"

"I'm very sorry, sir," stammered Charles, looking up at the bookseller. "I was only stealing a glance——"

"Stealing's the right word, heh?" interrupted his captor, whose conversation was a string of questions. "What were you reading? Colman? Not the sort of book I'd expect a lad to like, heh? How old are you? Nine?"

"Eleven, sir."

"Why don't you look it, then? Father send you to school?"

"He did, sir, at Chatham, but not now we are in London."

"Why don't he? D'you read much?"

Charles recited the names of his favorite books.

"*Tom Jones? Roderick Random?* What's that? Written a tragedy yourself? Acted in it? Going to be an actor and write plays too? Well, why not? Starve as well that way as any other, heh?—Oh, Mr. Barrow's your uncle, is he? Coming to see him again?"

"I hope so, sir."

"If I lend you books, will you bring 'em back? You will? Why thank me? Ain't I glad to do it?"

Charles mounted the stairs with a bundle of volumes under his arm. He found Thomas Barrow lying with his injured limb on a comfortable sofa. A self-indulgent life had not fitted him to bear pain, and he was in a vile temper.

"This cursed leg of mine's bad enough," he snapped at the boy, "without my being troubled with your father's affairs. I suppose he's sent you here because he thinks I'll pay his debts again. Well, I won't."

Charles confided that his father anticipated an early relief from his troubles.

"Bah! I never knew him otherwise. He always expects something or somebody to get him out of his confounded extravagance. I'll never forgive myself for bringing him and your mother together. My advice to you is to look out for yourself, and not rely on your father. He can't even look after himself."

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The boy flushed with shame.

"John Dickens thinks he's only to look round, and golden apples will drop into his pockets," continued the invalid. "I know only one man more conceited, and he's my fool of a barber. Just because he's read a couple of books about the war, my Snips stopped shaving me this morning to show how, if he'd been Boney, he'd have won Waterloo. He put his wet soap on my shoulder for Wellington; the scissors were Blücher, and when he told me what the razor—that's Boney—ought to have done, why, damme, he cut me."

Charles was not sorry to hear of this mischance, and did not stay long in his uncle's unfriendly company. He did not believe the criticism of his father, and, on reaching home, he indignantly told his mother what her brother had said.

"Poor Thomas was always delicate," she explained, "and I am not in the least surprised that he broke his leg. When he was a child, he never went through the winter without an attack of either bronchitis or anathema. As for his spiteful remarks, your father is well able to speak for himself, though I admit that it is often very difficult to follow what he says."

Charles began to read the books which had been lent him. As he laughed at the humorous characters in them, inspiration came to him. Why should he not try to write an account of his uncle's adventure with the barber?

He hastened to his attic with quill and paper, and set to work. It was past midnight when he finished. Next day he wrote a similar sketch of the deaf old woman who had cooked for them. She did not seem so humorous a subject as the barber, but Charles was an indulgent critic of his own work.

He read the two pieces to his mother but, in the middle of the account of the old woman, the baby cried and Mrs. Dickens left the room. Charles slunk back discouraged to his garret, read the sketches again, lost heart and tore them up. His ambition received a rebuff, and he sank back into idle misery.

Fanny, his elder sister, was more fortunate. Through the nomination of the piano-maker at whose premises she practised, her musical talents won her a scholarship at the

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newly founded Royal Academy of Music. When she went to live there, Charles carried her small bundle of belongings and, without altogether grudging her good luck, doubly realized his own misfortune. Nobody gave a thought to his happiness or his future. Not a word was said about his going to school. This was the more remarkable in that Mrs. Dickens meditated opening a school for young ladies.

"The excellence of your own upbringing, my love," John agreed, "qualifies you in the highest degree for the remunerative task of handing on the torch of knowledge to the daughters of duly authenticated gentlefolk. Our friend Huffam has influential connections in the East India trade, who will take a flying leap at the opportunity to confide their temporarily orphaned offspring to so adequate an instructress. Your worthy, if of late somewhat irascible, brothers are also in a position to recommend your establishment to parents. Success and prosperity hammer at the door. Unbolt it!"

Husband and wife decided that the school should not open in so poor and remote a neighborhood as Camden Town. They sought a more suitable address, and found a house in Gower Street, Bloomsbury, whither they moved in the autumn, to the dismay of the unpaid Bayham Street shopkeepers. Charles proudly supervised the fixture to the door of a brass plate engraved "Mrs. Dickens' Boarding Establishment for Young Ladies."

He pushed into the letter-boxes of a hundred neighboring houses copies of a circular in which John set forth his wife's merits and qualifications. Despite the brass plate and the circulars, however, no pupil ever came to the school, nor did Christopher Huffam introduce any.

Indeed, something strange seemed to be happening to Charles' godfather. When the boy visited him at Limehouse, the old gentleman no longer entertained company or provided such good dinners.

Mrs. Dickens' brothers too were unable to find pupils for her, and John's affairs declined steadily. Bloomsbury was more expensive than Camden Town. James Lamert did not accompany the family to Gower Street, and his rent was lost.

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One morning, as John tipped his hat to a jaunty angle before starting for Somerset House, two strangers knocked at the door, forced their way in and arrested him for debt.

The family were aghast, but John saw himself the central figure of a dramatic situation. Brushing aside his tears, he drew himself up and slapped the seals on his bosom.

"I am undone, fundamentally undone," he cried. "I am destined to plumb the bottomless abyss of terrestrial woe. It is all very well for a bachelor poet to state that stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage, but I am neither a bachelor nor a poet. I see no prospect of permanent happiness, Elizabeth, until I am a corpse and you a widow."

Smiling at this reflection, he kissed his wife and told her not to worry, for everything would come right. Then he embraced all the children in turn, shook hands with the officers and set off briskly with them down the street.

He was alone in his cheerfulness. Mrs. Dickens wept; the babies howled in sympathy, and Charles ran to the Academy to break the dreadful news to Fanny. On his return, his mother was still in tears.

When he asked her what she proposed to do, she replied, "Your father is the most practical man in the world, and will undoubtedly advise me."

She was gratified late in the evening by the arrival of an urchin with a note requesting Charles to visit the Marshalsea Prison in Southwark, next morning, and take his father a change of linen and a copy of the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

After a miserable night, the boy set out early with his parcel, crossed Blackfriars Bridge and came, through the Southwark slums, to a high wall which, he was told, bounded the prison. He followed it round, picturing his father chained to the floor in a dungeon, until he reached a gate. To his amazement, he thought he heard his father's voice raised in loud and cheerful conversation.

"Is Mr. Dickens in?" he asked a man who lounged by the gate, puffing at a clay pipe.

"I believe you!" said the man, not moving his head. "Werry much so! Boy to see you, Mr. Dickens," he cried.

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John appeared at the gate with outstretched arms, one of them holding a pewter tankard.

He kissed his son and led him into a large yard, surrounded partly by houses and partly by the wall. They climbed a staircase to a shabby but not uncomfortable room on the second floor.

"Here's sorrow; here's ignominy," declaimed John, sinking into a chair beside the blazing fire. "In the infelicitous wretch whom you observe before you, my dear boy, sunk to the lowest pit of suffering, you behold a victim of folly and extravagance. Put some more coals on the fire, will you?"

Charles was confused by the difference between his father's quarters and the dungeon which he had imagined.

"Is this really a prison?" he asked. "I thought that you'd be in uniform with a chain round your leg, like the men we saw in the dockyard at Chatham!"

"This, my dear boy, is a debtors' prison." John led him to the window. "I will explain," he said. "All these individuals whom you see, are able-bodied and, for the most part, not disinclined to engage in undertakings remunerative to themselves and profitable to their fellow creatures. But Society—for reasons intelligible to herself, if not to me—ordains that they shall remain idle within these four walls. If they were criminals, they would at least know the date of their release."

"How long will you have to stay here, father?"

"For ever, unless my creditor relents. He and Death alone have power to release me, and, of the two, Death will do it cheaper."

"No, father, no!" whimpered Charles.

"Resign yourself to the inevitable, my dear boy, with a stoical fortitude modeled on my own. We are born to suffer, and it is long past breakfast-time. Run up to the room immediately above this, give its tenant my compliments, and request the loan of a knife and fork!"

Charles' forebodings for his father were deepened by the squalor of the room up-stairs, but he found John facing a substantial breakfast.

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Afterward his father sent for a newspaper and read it to a group of acquaintances who, leaning against the wall, listened with deference to his airy comments. A very poor prisoner, whose history John related to Charles in a loud whisper, fetched ale for the company, and, in the afternoon, to digest a heavy dinner, father and son walked through the jail, John drawing a moral from each scene of despair and acknowledging the salutes of his fellows with gracious magnificence.

A bell announcing that the gate was about to be locked for the night, interrupted Charles in the midst of the comic song which he was singing, at his father's request, to a merry party gathered round the fire.

John wept at the parting, but Charles, as he hurried home, felt that they had passed a cheerful day and that his father was not so unhappy as he professed to be.

Mrs. Dickens certainly suffered more. She was left, almost unprovided, to battle with landlord, tradesmen and creditors, and to feed and clothe her children. Soon she told Charles that they must try to pawn their few remaining possessions.

He was timid and ashamed, the first time he went to the pawnbroker's. He hid in the shadows till no one was in sight, and, even then, hardly dared to push open the door.

Peering through the darkness, he saw that he was in a small cubicle, confronting a hunchbacked young man across a counter.

"Well?" said the hunchback. "What's the game?"

"Please, sir," said Charles, "will you buy this warming-pan?"

The young man examined it. "What d'you want on it?" he asked.

"I—I don't know, sir."

"A million pounds? Three ha'pence?"

"Whichever is right, sir," said Charles.

"Bless my soul, ain't you ever put anything up the spout before?"

"No, sir, never."

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"I'll give you half a dollar; the Bank of England wouldn't give a farthing more. Will you take it?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"On one condition, though. D'you know any Latin?"

"A very little, sir," murmured Charles anxiously.

"Decline a substantive of the second declension while I'm making out the tickets. If you make one single mistake, I'll halve the money. Fire away!"

Charles piped his declension, while the other wrote out the duplicate tickets. Afterward they shook hands and the hunchback invited Charles to touch his hump for luck. He told him always to enter by the same door, and on no account to deal with the proprietor, who was a hard bargainer.

The boy had now to break up his little library. Books, however, were not accepted at the pawnbroker's; and the friendly assistant advised him to take them to a bookseller in the Hampstead Road.

The man was still in bed, haggard and tremulous from an overnight drinking-bout. His wife, her sallow face disfigured by a black eye, leaned against the window shrilly cursing him. He held out his hand for the books, asked Charles suspiciously where he had obtained them, grunted at his reply, and offered three shillings.

Charles bargained for another shilling till the man demanded his purse from his wife and, finding it empty, shouted oaths at her. The boy ran down-stairs in terror but, before he reached the bottom, the woman called after him, thrust the money in his hand, and snatched the books.

Soon nothing remained in the Gower Street house except a few mattresses, a table and some chairs. These were all brought down to the ground floor, where the family spent their days and nights.

One morning Mrs. Dickens dressed with especial care and left Charles in charge of the children. During her absence *Misnar* was revived. It was a lengthy performance, for Alfred, the baby, cast as the Chief Eunuch, complicated the action by interpolations and disappearances not provided by the author.

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When his mother returned, late in the afternoon, she told Charles that she had secured his future prosperity. James Lamert, she said, who had renounced his commission in the army, in favor of a younger brother, and undertaken the management of a blacking factory, was willing to make an opening there for Charles.

He was to start the next Monday. Working at the factory every week-day until half-past five, he would receive six shillings a week, with the prospect of an early advance to seven, if he proved industrious.

"I told James that I was sure that you would be satisfactory, because you are so like your dear father. James was most impressed—at least, he laughed, and said that I could not have given you a more remarkable recommendation."

"When do you inaugurate your mercantile career, my dear boy?" asked his father, when Charles told him the news at the Marshalsea next morning. "Monday? Ah, how I envy you the priceless possession of youth and energy! Apprentice—journeyman—merchant—alderman—sheriff—Lord Mayor—what are these but rungs in the ladder of prosperity? That I have temporarily fallen off it, need not deter you. Our stars are undoubtedly cast in different horoscopes. Yours are comets; mine, I fear, mere will-o'-the-wisps. Fortune thrusts her kisses upon you. Reciprocate them!"

Fired by his father's enthusiasm, Charles could hardly wait for Monday to arrive. To become Lord Mayor of London, he reflected, was every whit as attractive as to be a famous actor and playwright.

CHAPTER THREE

ON MONDAY morning he rose at daybreak and prepared himself for his entrance into business. He gazed anxiously at his trousers, which the orphan servant had washed overnight; they would pass except in a very strong light. His jacket was torn and his tall white hat battered, but he contrived to mask their worst defects.

He came down-stairs with his boots in his hand. They were deplorable. Cracked and patched, the uppers hardly held to the soles. He prepared to ink over the most noticeable blemishes, when a comforting thought stopped him.

Why need he waste time on his boots now, when he could shine them at the factory with real blacking, unlimited blacking, the best blacking? What was more, he would surely be allowed to bring home a few pots of it, so that he could surprise his mother and his brothers and sisters next morning by polishing their boots until they looked like new!

Uproariously he summoned the family to breakfast, reduced the babies to hopeless giggling, swallowed a mouthful of food so hurriedly that he choked, and dashed away through the streets. He found the factory, after many inquiries, in the depths of the Adelphi, a dirty, crazy old house overlooking the Thames.

Entering by an open door, inscribed "Warren's Original Blacking," he stood at the foot of a dark staircase. As he climbed this, guiding himself by the decrepit banister, there came a scuffle and a squeak under his feet, and two small black shapes pattered away. The house was alive with rats.

A door at the top of the stairs brought him into an ill-lighted office. Here several clerks worked on high stools, while James Lamert, his old playmate, sat behind a partition at an imposing desk.

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"Hallo, James!" Charles cried, waving to him. "Why! You've shaved off your mustache."

"Shh!" whispered James hastily, as the clerks sniggered. "No one in the City wears mustaches—bad for credit. And you must call me 'Sir' here. Now, this is where you will work," he added, leading him to a small table in a corner. "I shall be able to keep my eye on you, and you need not mix with the workmen down-stairs."

"What am I to do?" asked Charles, taken aback by James' brusque manner.

"The same as the other boys. They'll show you. Bob Fagin!" he shouted down another staircase.

A lad, rather older and taller than Charles, shambled upstairs. His face was round, red and good-natured; he wore a coarse sacking apron over his ragged clothes and a white paper cap.

"Show Master Dickens how you work, Bob," ordered James, returning to his own desk.

Bob Fagin grinned amiably at Charles, winked and pulled an appalling grimace. In dumb show he showed him how to cover the necks of the full blacking-pots, first with grease-proof paper and then with blue paper, to fasten these papers down with string and, last, to affix the firm's printed label.

Charles imitated him. The first attempts were clumsy, but after an hour of Bob's tuition he turned out a pot in fair shape. By this time his back and arms ached abominably, and he sat down to rest. Bob laughed.

"You're a soft 'un, you are," he said. "This 'ere's an easy place—only ten hours a day, time off for dinner and no night work. In them new factories they works children all day and all night, mindin' machinery. V'y, only a week since, three nippers, near vere I lives, fell into a furniss consekens of not bein' able to keep havake no longer. This 'ere Warrenses is 'appiness and comfort."

"I'm not used to it yet," said Charles.

"This your fust job? You're lucky. I shouldn't wonder if you've had schoolin'. Yus, I thought so. Reg'lar young gen'l'man! The foreman says you're the guv'nor's cousin."

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"His father married my aunt," Charles explained.

"So that's v'y he don't vant you to vork halong o' me and Poll Green."

"Poll Green? Who's she?" inquired Charles.

"Oh, lor'!" cried Bob, "that's a good 'un, that is. Oh, von't Poll cut up rough, v'en he hears you took him for a girl!"

"Poll's a girl's name."

"Not *Saint* Poll ain't. Poll vos christened arter the cathed'al, consekens of being born within its preesinks. He knows life, does Poll. His father's a fireman at Drury Lane, and his sister does himps and hangels in the pantomimes. Reg'lar perfess'nal family. I ain't got no father; I'm an orfling, I am. Always vos. I lives at my brother's, vot's a vaterman at the Tower with 'is own boat. V're's *your* dad?"

Charles hesitated, and Bob misunderstood his silence. "I s'pose it ain't for the likes o' me to question the likes o' you," he grumbled. "Poll Green, he can't abide gen'l'folk—stuck up, he calls 'em. Vell, I always do say to him, 'No doubt,' I says, 'but vot gen'l'folk vos sent to try us, like hother afflictions.'"

Charles was about to defend himself, when the clock struck. Bob jumped from the bench on which they sat.

"Dinner," he announced. "Comin' to play along o' Poll an' me on the barges? It's prime."

The newcomer remembered his mother's parting injunction to do an hour's lesson with Lamert every day. She had handed him the Latin primer, and he felt that now he ought to approach his cousin. Nevertheless, the thought of lessons at dinner-time was depressing, and he much preferred the idea of Poll and the barges.

He tapped at the partition behind which James sat.

"Well," said the latter, "have you learned the work?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy, and then, reluctantly, "Shall we do my Latin now?"

"Latin?" cried James, frowning. "What Latin? Oh yes, I remember. Not just at present, Charles—a little later in the day, perhaps. Remind me of it this afternoon!"

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Charles ran down-stairs after Bob, whom he found removing his apron in the dark basement. Bob led him along a tumbledown stone passage to the water's edge, where Poll Green awaited them on a barge.

Poll was not so terrifying as Charles had feared. He was a short, pale, heavy-faced boy, even more ragged and dirty than Bob. When he spoke, his face lit with impudent malice.

"Hit's the young nobleman, his it not?" he said, addressing Charles with a grotesque bow. "Oh, no, cert'nly not. No, to be sure. Good mornin', 'ighness. Vee ain't grand enough for 'im, are vee, Bob? Oh, no, cert'nly not. So he's kept away from us, in case vee gives him the chooleray. By all means. Of course. Oh, cert'nly." And he clenched a dirty fist under Charles' nose.

"I don't think myself too good for you, Mr. Green," said Charles earnestly, "and it's not my fault that Mr. Lamert put me up-stairs. I'd much rather be down-stairs with you, really I would."

Bob bore witness that Charles was a real sport and suggested that Poll and he should shake hands and bear no malice. This done, Bob and Poll drew greasy bundles and clasp-knives from their pockets and began to eat their dinner, while Charles looked on hungrily.

"Your lordship don't dine till ewening, I s'pose. Dining early is a low vulgar habit. Yes, I don't think," commented Poll, not so ill-naturedly.

Charles explained that he had not thought to bring any dinner with him, but that he had sixpence with which he would gladly buy food.

"Sixpence is a heap o' money," Bob said, wrinkling his forehead. "You can buy a penny loaf and three saveloys. Or you can do yourself proud vith a fourp'ny plate o' beef at a cook-shop, give a ha'penny to the vaiter, as expects it, and have three-ha'pence left. If you fancy a drop o' beer, it's tuppence a quart across the vay at the 'Fox Under the Hill'; and a lump o' bread and cheese is a brown, so you can do it over twice for sixpence. Then there's pudden. There's two

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prime places—one back o' St. Martin's, t' other in the Strand v're they've real pudden, as *is* pudden, 'ot an' 'eavy. You pays your money and you takes—vot they gives you."

"I don't want to spend all my money," Charles admitted.

Then, because puddings were scarce at Gower Street, he begged Bob and Poll to guide him to the nearer pudding shop. While Poll infuriated the cook with sarcasms, Charles, seated on a high stool at the counter, ate his dinner.

Lamert did not mention Latin when Charles returned in the afternoon. Nor did the boy remind him of it. He craved companionship—even that of Bob and Poll. Lamert heard with surprise his plea to be allowed to work with the boys down-stairs, but saw no reason to refuse it.

So Bob, vastly pleased, and Poll, mollified by this overture, helped Charles to carry down his pots, paste and paper.

His new workroom was dark and damp. It stank of the rats who made it their playground, but it was brightened for Charles by the presence of the two boys and the workmen. Bob, Poll and he worked at a table under a dirty window. When dusk came, they stopped for half an hour, and ran to a coffee-shop for a cup of coffee and a hunk of bread.

At last it grew too dark to work, even by the light of the dips on the table. Lamert and the clerks had departed; now the workmen put on their coats. This was a signal that the boys might go home.

Charles, exhausted with unaccustomed labor, plodded toward Gower Street.

With weariness came a revulsion of spirits. He saw that all his dreams of prosperity were folly, that he would soon degenerate into a ragged, dirty little slave like Bob and Poll. Utter dejection overcame him as he squelched through the muddy streets. Only a few weeks before, he had been Mr. Giles' favorite pupil and had gazed at the house on top of Gad's Hill with the eye of a prospective owner! Now he was condemned to drudgery among low companions; his father was in jail, and the future was dark and terrifying.

He found his mother lamenting a new failure to conciliate the landlord, and did not tell her the truth about the factory.

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He gulped a few mouthfuls of bread and cheese, and flung himself down, fully dressed, on his tousled mattress, too tired to say his prayers.

Suddenly he remembered how he had looked forward to polishing his boots at the factory, and to the surprise of the family next morning when they found theirs all bright and shiny with blacking. This was the worst blow! He abandoned himself to his grief, and wept bitterly.

When he woke in the morning, aching muscles reminded him of his new occupation. He hurried down to the kitchen and rinsed his hands and face perfunctorily. Five minutes later he was slouching through the streets, as sullen and slow as, the day before, he had been eager and confident. His dinner, a crust of bread and a slice of meat, was wrapped in a scrap of newspaper under his arm.

Bob and Poll were already at work. The former grinned a greeting; the latter complained that Charles was late. He was pleased to find himself quicker at the work, although still far behind the others. They ate their food together in one of the barges, and afterward spent a perilous half-hour exploring the slippery wharf. When they returned to the factory, he felt faint: his head swam, the familiar spasms pierced his side, and beads of sweat dropped from his forehead. He fell from the chair on which he had taken refuge, and rolled in agony on the floor.

The good-natured foreman carried him moaning to a heap of straw in a dark corner, while Bob filled empty blacking-pots with hot water and laid them on Charles' body to ease the pain. By tea-time he felt better and hobbled into the fresh air on Bob's arm.

The joy of receiving his wages on Saturday afternoon made up for a little of his wretchedness, and he listened proudly to the jingle of the six shillings in his pocket. He intended to hand them intact to his mother, but, when he came to a baker's shop, outside which a heap of stale pastry was displayed, hunger battled with his resolution.

He entered and bought several large heavy cakes.

Munching these, he stopped outside a bookshop and gazed

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longingly through the window. Books, however, were too expensive, so he moved to a box full of magazines which offered an extensive supply of mixed reading at a modest price. After turning them over, he finally bought the thickest. Loitering under every lamp to read a paragraph, and finishing a cake between the lights, he crept home.

His mother waved aside the money he offered her.

"I have made up my mind to take the children and join your poor father in that dreadful Marshalsea," she told him. "The landlord came again this morning and wanted his rent or the key of the front door. I offered him a cup of tea, but he said it was not the same thing. Then the butcher refused to give me further credit. I told him that we could not do without meat, like Red Indians who live on scalps and worship the sun. He was not at all polite, and your father would not have allowed any one to address me in such a manner; so I see no alternative to placing myself and the children under his protection in the Marshalsea. We shall have only one room, but that room will be our moated castle."

"But I have to go to work," said Charles.

"Your father has decided that you are not to accompany us. You will board with a respectable widow in Little College Street, and Fanny, of course, will stay at the Academy."

They all spent the next day with John in the prison and, in the evening, Mrs. Dickens took Charles to his lodgings.

"This is my son, Mrs. Roylance," she announced to a lame old woman, who surveyed Charles with glassy gray eyes.

"He's a teeny, weeny bit small for his age, and no questions asked," commented the landlady, who had a habit of scattering her sentences with familiar tags. "But, broadly speaking, he'll blossom here, ma'am."

"I'm certain you will find him a very good boy," said Mrs. Dickens.

"We'll be, there or thereabouts, the best of friends," replied the old woman. "You have seen his pretty bedroom, ma'am, in a manner of speaking."

"It is a very pleasant room," Mrs. Dickens agreed.

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Charles kissed her tenderly and promised to bring Fanny to see her at the prison each Sunday—though he was careful not to name the place before Mrs. Roylance.

No sooner had Mrs. Dickens gone than his landlady's manner changed. "It's dark, and so on," she said sharply. "Up to bed this minute, you undersized little brat!"

She drove him up narrow stuffy stairs to a bare attic. "There's the bed," she snapped. "What with one thing and another, in you get!"

"But there's some one in it already," said Charles.

"Two of 'em, if you know what I mean. Now don't let me hear another sound till morning, so to speak, or I'll beat the life out of you!"

She waited, mumbling under her breath, until he took his place beside his bedfellows; then she locked the door behind her with a final warning against noise or mischief, weather permitting.

"She's a dragon, ain't she?" whispered one of the little boys in the bed. "Can't she just wallop, too!"

Charles discovered that he was older than the others. They were sons of a gentleman whom they had never seen and who was understood to live in India and to be often in arrears with their money. The whispered conversation ended abruptly when Mrs. Roylance came up-stairs again and stood outside the door.

"Here's your breakfast, whether or not," she said next morning, placing a small loaf and a glass of milk on the parlor table beside Charles, while the other children waited hungrily for her to fill their bowls with the porridge. She herself sat down to a large plate of kidneys and hot buttered toast.

"You'll pay me tuppence a day for your breakfast," she told him, rubbing a piece of toast round her plate to capture the last drops of gravy. "You'll buy your own bread and cheese for supper, on the face of it, and pay for your washing and all breakage. So, not knowing, can't say."

Charles began the day at the warehouse by borrowing a pencil and working out how much of his wages would be

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left when he had paid for his meals. He found that the margin would be very small, and bought, in consequence, so poor a dinner that he remained almost as hungry as before. Then he divided his money into little parcels, one for each remaining day of the week.

On Saturday he was just able to purchase a magazine and to spend a penny on stale pastry.

Next morning he met Fanny outside the Academy in Hanover Square. They walked hand in hand to the prison, where they found their mother much improved in spirits. The orphan servant came in each day to help her. John had settled down to enjoy the Marshalsea; where he had made himself the unofficial president of the prisoners, his eloquence delighting them as much as himself.

"It is nothing less than remarkable," he confided to Charles, "how these unfortunate victims of economic adversity rely on my judgment. They seek my guidance on the most varied subjects, ranging from the preparation of petitions for release to the question as to which of the taps that supply these crib'd, cabin'd and confined purlieus provides the malted liquor most grateful to a connoisseur's palate."

"Your father pays for all the ale they try," Mrs. Dickens interposed.

"I could hardly do less, my love," replied her husband complacently. "It is the privilege of my station, facilitated, I should explain, by the fact that their Lordships of the Admiralty have not yet thought fit to discontinue the regular payment of my inadequate emoluments. Now, my dear Charles, recount to us your experiences in the busy world of commerce. To use a technical expression: How stands the Rialto? Have you set your foot firmly on the box-seat of advancement? Are you playing football with Fortune?"

Charles had no heart to confess his misery at the factory, but he told of his loneliness in Mrs. Roylance's house.

"How natural, my love," commented John, "that our eldest son should desire to enjoy the advantages of a mother's solicitude and a father's society! I am now, Elizabeth, as you

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know, in momentary expectation of release from durance vile, but the inexplicable reluctance of my creditors to come to terms must inevitably cause a certain further delay. Can we not so arrange matters that Charles may reside in closer proximity to us, even though lack of space prevents his actual nestling in our one-room bosom? Be good enough, my dear boy, to convey to the turnkey, with my compliments, that I desire the pleasure of his company for a few moments."

Charles fetched the turnkey, who arrived, wiping his lips, and was disappointed that John wished only to inquire about lodgings in the neighborhood. He recommended a house in Lant Street, belonging to an agent of the Insolvent Court.

Mrs. Dickens went there at once with Charles, leaving the other children with Fanny and the orphan.

"What a beautiful place!" cried Charles, when the agent's wife showed them a clean little room. The prospect of having it to himself delighted him. When his mother found that the rent would not be larger than was paid to Mrs. Roylance, she arranged for him to move at the next week-end.

The boy annoyed Mrs. Roylance by his cheerfulness that evening. He forestalled her threat to chastise him by giving notice of his departure.

"You ungrateful little monster, as a matter of fact!" was her furious comment.

She seized the two other boys, whipped them until they screamed, and packed them off supperless to bed.

Charles found his new landlord and landlady as good-natured as Mrs. Roylance was malicious. He used now to walk to the Marshalsea early each morning, breakfast with his parents, and hurry to the warehouse, returning to the prison for supper. Every Sunday he fetched Fanny from the Academy to spend the whole day with the family.

He loathed the blacking-bottles more and more. James Lamert avoided him, but he became excellent friends with the muscular foreman. They were chatting one morning when a young man entered and inquired if Mr. Lamert was in.

"Here, Bob," said the foreman, "cut up-stairs and tell the guvnor that vun of them poets is here."

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Charles looked shyly at the visitor. This was the first poet he had ever seen, and he was awestruck, though the poet's appearance was hardly impressive. He was a pimply young man with long, ringleted hair and sunken eyes, wearing clothes that had once been flashy but now were dirty and threadbare.

"What rhymes with 'Warren'?" he asked Charles suddenly.

"I really don't know, sir," murmured Charles.

"No more do I," said the poet. "Of course, there's 'foreign' and 'florin', but I've used them so often for the original Warren in the Strand. But now that this place calls itself the Original Warren, which it ain't, I've got to find substitutes. There's 'Koran'—but that don't help much, since niggers don't need blacking. There's 'barren,' which is a true rhyme but not in request. I do believe that Warren and Blacking are the very awkwardest words in the language to build a poem on."

Bob returned to say that Lamert was too busy to see the poet, who departed, still complaining of his difficulties.

"Is he a real poet?" Charles asked the foreman excitedly.

"And a werry nasty vun," he replied. "A young gen'l'man vith your brains and eddication could do his day's po'try before breakfast and eat the heartier for it. You ought to be at school studyin' for a poet. Vot your father's thinkin' of, I can't imagine."

By degrees Charles won his way to the affections of Bob and Poll. They showed him their favorite haunts in the subterranean Adelphi arches, where he saw men and women huddled together under the vaults, bundles of filthy rags sunk in misery and disease. He discovered the degradation of the poorest of his fellow creatures—and felt himself not far removed from them.

Even Bob and Poll, he believed, would despise him if they discovered that his father was a prisoner in the Marshalsea, and he was terrified lest an accident should reveal the secret.

One evening this nearly happened. He had suffered a recurrence of his spasms, and the two boys insisted on seeing him home, though he tried to shake them off.

"I am quite well now, thank you," he said for the tenth time, as they crossed Southwark Bridge.

"Quite vell; absolootly. Oh, yes. Certainly," mimicked Poll, clasping his arm more tightly.

The Marshalsea and Lant Street were very close, and Charles was desperate. Suddenly inspired, he stopped outside a large house on the water-front and shook hands with his companions. "I live here," he explained.

Bob whistled in admiration, and even Poll was abashed by the magnificence of the house. Charles climbed the clean white steps and waved farewell. They walked slowly away, glancing over their shoulders, and he pulled the bell. Just as they turned the corner, a servant opened the door.

"Does Sir Robert Fagin live here?" asked Charles coolly and, expressing surprise at his error, hurried in the opposite direction.

He found his family jubilant. John was haranguing a knot of prisoners with more than his usual vigor. Mrs. Dickens, the babies and the orphan laughed and played merrily.

"My dear, dear boy," cried John, breaking off his discourse and leading Charles up-stairs, "this is indeed a day of rejoicing. The celestial light has peeped forth from behind the financial clouds, and its rays shine once more upon your humble servant. The winter of our discontent will shortly give place to more seasonable conditions. I am about to be released."

By what means this had been arranged, Charles did not discover. Sometimes John spoke vaguely of a legacy, but he never disclosed whence it came. His salary had been continued during his imprisonment, thanks to the Barrow influence at the Admiralty, and possibly he saved enough of it to satisfy the creditor who had obtained his arrest. To keep the others at bay he now passed through the Insolvent Debtors' Court. There he was called upon to sur-

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render all his property—even Charles was searched to make sure that his belongings did not exceed twenty pounds in value—and to execute a warrant of attorney for the amount of his unsatisfied debts, which could be presented at any future time when he appeared to have assets.

Once this formality was settled, there was nothing to keep John in the Marshalsea and he returned, in unruffled spirits, to Somerset House.

Charles hoped that, with this temporary removal of his father's financial troubles, his own servitude at the blacking factory would cease. But John said nothing. Instead, a fresh humiliation befell the boy. The factory was transferred to Covent Garden. The new house was cleaner and better equipped, but the three urchins were put to work at a table beside a large window which gave directly upon the street. They thus became living advertisements of their employer's business.

All day a crowd pressed against the window to gaze at them. Charles, sick with shame, tried to turn away his face. Suppose he were recognized by any of his former friends! Suppose Mr. Tribe, or Lucy, or Mary Weller, his old nurse, or Mr. Giles were to see him!

He was at his work one afternoon when a loud tap on the window startled him. There stood John, resplendent in new clothes. He beckoned imperiously, and Charles, throwing off his paper cap, ran out to him.

"Is it decent," cried John, "that a scion of my house should be publicly exhibited in a window to the gapes of the vulgar, as if he were a monster in a menagerie? You degrade me before my fellow citizens, Charles. You bow down my head with shame. Go to! Tell your cousin that I insist upon your labor being conducted in a situation less open to the public eye."

John strode magnificently away. The boy knocked at Lamert's door and nervously told him what his father had said.

James listened with a lowering face.

"I have communicated with James through epistolary

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channels," John announced when Charles reached home that evening. "I will not be treated like the parent of a living skeleton or a bearded woman."

The effect of the letter was hardly what John anticipated. James sent for the boy when he arrived next morning.

"Your father has insulted me in a letter concerning you," he said. "The remedy, to my mind, is that you should work here no longer. Here is a week's wages. Now go!"

Charles burst into tears, in which the shame of dismissal and an overwhelming relief were mingled. Bob was nearly as upset as Charles himself, when he heard the news; but Poll Green remarked grimly that one could expect nothing else from gentlefolk; oh, no, certainly not. The foreman shook Charles' hand, assuring him that it was all for the best.

John was absent when Charles, bewildered by his freedom, arrived home at noon and threw the household into a tumult with his tidings. Mrs. Dickens donned her best cloak and bonnet and went out.

"I called on James this afternoon," she announced, when the family assembled for supper, "and told him that I knew him when he was a little boy in petticoats only so high, and I would thank him not to treat Charles as a person of no importance, for he is certainly much better-looking than James was at his age."

"It was hardly necessary for you to put yourself to so much inconvenience, my love," interrupted John. "I enlarged upon your feelings with considerable emphasis in my missive."

"James was very sorry," Mrs. Dickens continued, disregarding him, "but he said that he could not help being quick-tempered and, as you know, his father used to be so angry with the soldiers at Chatham who died when he gave them medicine. James said that your letter came as a shock, after all he had tried to do for Charles. So I told him that we were certainly grateful and realized what a favor he had done the boy. Then he said that, in consideration of his father having married Charles' aunt,—though why they

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wanted to go with the regiment to Ireland, all among the rebels and the begorrahs, I never understood,—he would overlook the letter and give Charles another chance.”

She gazed triumphantly at her husband.

“Don’t make me go back to that dreadful place,” Charles implored his father. “I hate it. Why don’t you send me to school? Please don’t send me back to the factory.”

John looked at him with surprised understanding. For a moment he hesitated; then, bracing himself, he spoke to his wife.

“My love,” he said, “your nephew has insulted me by his treatment of Charles. I can not permit the indignity to be glossed over; I am not a palimpsest. No, Elizabeth,”—he raised his hand to hush her protests,—“we have too long neglected our obligations to this token of our love. I shall take immediate steps to place him in a scholastic establishment where he may imbibe erudition from a cup extended by an adequately qualified but not unreasonably expensive pedagogue.”

“Any one would think,” sobbed Mrs. Dickens, “that I had no claim to be consulted. My dear pa always said that I was casting myself away on you like Robinson Crusoe, and now I see my interest in my son’s future is to be flouted. No one would guess how I lost my way in Covent Garden among the vegetables and the actors. Just when Charles is set up in a good post—and I can not see why he should not be a partner in a few years and keep his own carriage—my own husband turns against me. Of course Charles will go to work to-morrow morning.”

“No, no, no,” cried Charles, falling on his knees beside John’s chair. “Don’t make me go back! I can’t bear it any longer. I’d rather die. Send me to school, and I’ll work hard—I promise I will.”

John put his arm around the trembling child’s shoulders.

“You shall go to school at once,” he declared.

Mrs. Dickens flounced out of the room. Charles clung to his father to stop him from following her. She returned later, but spent the rest of the evening in offended silence.

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When the boy's bedtime came, he kissed John but passed her as if she were not there. He told Fanny that he could never forgive his mother for wishing to send him back to the factory.

In this single evening his love for her vanished, like a bubble bursting in the air, and a tense, nervous, jealous antagonism rose between them. Abnormally sensitive and precocious, Charles began to represent the factory incident to himself as a deliberate attempt by his mother to make him unhappy, and persuaded himself that she cared nothing for his welfare. So he could hardly bear to look at her, to talk to her, to stay in the same room with her.

For her part, Mrs. Dickens was wounded by his changed manner and by the implied slight on her affection for him. She inflamed the wound by brooding on it, by watching Charles narrowly, and by demonstrating to her own satisfaction that he had thrown away his hopes of fortune.

Each took an obstinate pleasure in proving the other wrong in the most trivial details. Their love was transformed into an instinctive, unspoken hostility.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Do SPARE a penny, lady, please spare a penny."

A short-sighted old lady, walking slowly down the sunny side of the street, realized that this whine came from two small figures who had stopped before her.

"I haven't any money for beggar boys," she snapped, not unkindly.

"Vee ain't beggars, lady," the voice went on. "Vee're orflings, vee are, vot's lost our pa and ma and ain't touched a bite to eat not since a week ago come last Tuesday."

"Bless me," exclaimed the old lady, stopping and feeling in her reticule. "Are you sure you are telling the truth?"

"Vord of honor, lady. Vee did find a crust o' bread in the gutter yesterday, but vee took it home to our little in-waleed sister. Sixpence vill do, kind lady, if you ain't got no coppers."

She was searching, however, not for money, but for her spectacles. Fixing them on her nose, she gasped in surprise at the sight of a sturdy little boy, neatly dressed in a pepper-and-salt suit and a white hat. His rosy features were distorted into an exaggerated grimace of agony, in keeping with his part. A few yards away stood his companion, grinning with admiration.

"Be off with you," cried the indignant old lady. "Little wretches, pretending to be hungry."

"Looks is werry deceiving, ma'am," persisted the boy. "Vee're suffering from dropsy, consekens of being all swelled up with nothing."

The old lady struck at him with her umbrella, whereupon he turned a somersault in affected terror and walked around her on his hands.

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"It's no go, Charles," said his companion. "Come and make a back!"

They played leapfrog for a few minutes, and perched themselves breathless on a gate.

Nearly three years at Mr. Jones' "Classical and Commercial Academy" in the Hampstead Road had altered Charles beyond recognition. Gone was the mask of despair; he seemed even to have cast off the physical weakness which had shadowed his childhood. The pale invalid of Chatham, the dispirited drudge of the factory, was now transformed into a healthy, laughing, mischievous youngster. He was small for his fifteen years, but to balance his lack of inches he wore a stiff turn-down collar which made him appear older than most of his Byron-frilled schoolfellows.

This collar symbolized the authority he had established over them, for he led them in everything except scholarship. His was the inspiration for their performances of *The Miller and His Men* and of *Cherry and Fair Star*, and he took the chief parts in the plays and their production. He founded, edited and wrote most of the school magazine, the *Terrific Register*, and set the fashion in devising coaches, pumps and boats worked by the white mice which lived in the boys' desks.

"School will be dull when you're gone, Charles," sighed his crony.

"I'm sure it will," said Charles complacently. "But, anyhow, don't forget my lingo!"

"Trustaloo me-aloo foraloo thataloo," replied the other. "Are-aloo you-aloo sorryaloo to-aloo be-aloo leaving-aloo?"

"Goingaloo to-aloo make-aloo myaloo fortune-aloo," Charles explained, with painstaking adherence to the secret language he had invented.

"What at?" asked the other, dropping into ordinary speech in his curiosity.

"This time to-morrow I shall be a solicitor's clerk in Gray's Inn."

"Will you make much money?"

"Ten shillings a week to begin, until I learn the Law."

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"That's a lot, isn't it?"

"No," said Charles scornfully, "rather not. But I shall be living at home."

"Surely a fellow can live on ten shillings?"

"I tell you he can't," cried Charles. "Why, when I earned seven at the——" He stopped in confusion.

"What? Have you been to work before?" asked his friend, with great interest. "Where was it? When?"

Charles did not answer. He was running away. As he ran, he wondered how he could have been so reckless as nearly to divulge the secret which he had carefully guarded during the whole of his school-days. He never found it easy to keep a secret; his was a nature which loved to share its impressions and emotions, but, despite this, no boy nor master at school ever had reason to suspect his experience of the blacking factory and the Marshalsea.

"Father," he said after supper that evening, "please never tell any one about my having already been at work."

"You need fear no indiscretion from my lips, my dear Charles. Your past is locked for ever in my bosom. Wild horses could not extract it—or any other horses."

As he spoke, John brushed some crumbs from the portly bosom to which he referred. Good living had expanded his figure. The Admiralty had dispensed with his services a few months after his release from the Marshalsea but, in consideration of his twenty years' service, had granted him a pension of nearly three pounds a week. He had thereupon entered the employ of a wine-merchant as a traveler on commission.

He loved to swagger into an inn and astonish the customers in the bar by his eloquence. Over a glass of wine he endeavored to wheedle the landlord into giving him an order. If the landlord treated him, he returned the compliment, so that, eating, drinking and talking, he spent his time congenially, though he brought little profit to his employer.

"Your advancement in the legal sphere, my dear Charles," he continued, "is so largely contingent on the con-

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fidence you inspire among your future colleagues that you will do well to model yourself upon the succulent but taciturn oyster. If any one asks you, for example, to recommend a brand of blacking, you should reply, 'My dear sir, what is blacking?' You follow me?"

"Yes, father."

"I admit that, in one respect, Fate has disappointed me. I anticipated, when I invited Christopher Huffam to be your godfather, that you would become a partner in the important commercial enterprises which he controlled. I had then no presentiment that by an unfortunate, not to say disastrous, concatenation of circumstances he would, shortly after myself, be reduced to the indignities of the Insolvent Court. You are, therefore, cast once more on your own resources, backed, of course, by my own profound knowledge of mice and men."

"The Law's as good as mastmaking, I hope," said Charles.

"Infinitely superior, my dear boy. Now, since to-morrow you commence—observe that I say 'commence' and not 'recommence'—since to-morrow you commence your adventures on the road to fame, I will confide to you my plans for my own future. I have reason to believe that my labors no longer command the whole-hearted approbation of the individual in the wine trade who at present commands them. I intend, therefore, to withdraw my support from him. It is my purpose to devote my energies to the realm of letters. I do not propose to write a book—of which, as you may be aware, a not disinterested person once observed that to kill one was almost as good as killing a man—but to obtain a permanent position upon the staff of a newspaper. Thus, while you acquire the dignified status and the corresponding emoluments of the Law, I shall be proving, in a different sphere, that the pen is mightier, as it is undeniably more handy, than the sword."

Charles arrived at Mr. Blackmore's offices in Gray's Inn eager to make a good impression. He had become acquainted with the lawyer through the latter's landlady, a connection

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of the Barrow family, who had persuaded him to give Charles employment.

"What book would you like me to study first?" Charles asked him.

"Eh? Oh, my petty cash book, to be sure," answered the lawyer with a chuckle. "Come, I'll hand you over to my clerk. He'll show you what to do."

He called in a large ungainly man who carried his head on one side, his reddish hair gleaming against a pasty complexion; his face was round and expressionless, except that he smiled continually.

"Here is Dickens," said Blackmore, "of whom I have spoken to you. I want him to gain as much experience as possible."

"Exactly, sir," answered the clerk. "Come with me, Dickens, please, and I will show you round the office, so that you can settle down comfortably to your work."

Charles bowed to Blackmore and preceded the clerk out of the door.

"Now," said the man, "I want you to regard me as your especial friend. I always like to see young men succeed, especially young men with ambition. You have ambition, have you not, Dickens?"

"Yes, sir," answered Charles.

"I dare say that Mr. Blackmore intends to make you a partner when you are old enough?"

"I hope so, sir."

"Perhaps your path is being smoothed by your dear father investing money in the business?"

Charles did not think so, and the clerk seemed pleased.

"Then you are just a young man, starting like any other young man? You expect to do well, I hope?"

"I certainly don't wish to remain a clerk all my life."

"Of course not," purred the man. "That would never do, would it? But, I wonder, Dickens, did you think, when you said that, how wounding it must be to my feelings? I am only a clerk, you know. Not that I bear you a grudge for your shaft. I am always glad to have my pride lowered.

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But we must do unto others, you know, what they do unto us, and I discern the seeds of pride in you, too, Dickens. We must root them out while we can. Or perhaps you will always be a clerk."

At this moment Blackmore called the clerk to him. Charles sat on a stool, drawing meaningless lines on a sheet of paper. He felt instinctive mistrust of the clerk, and suspected that he had taken a dislike to him.

His fear proved true. Still professing boundless good nature, the man set him to every dull and thankless labor he could devise, and singled him out as his butt. He took care that, whenever Blackmore entered the room, Charles should be in trouble. The boy passed his days in running errands, copying folio after folio of documents, making out interminable bills of costs, and fetching and carrying for the rest of the staff. Even so, he found these tasks less galling than the clerk's attitude of watchful concern.

His taskmaster used to shake his head over Charles' handwriting, which was as neat as any reasonable person could wish.

"Neatness and application, Dickens, are needed by us all. You, I almost fear, need them more than any one. Let us join together in repairing the deficiencies of your character." And he would make Charles copy the whole document afresh, keeping him long after the others had gone home.

He allowed Charles no scrap of satisfaction. He always found a blemish in the most carefully copied deed, a slip in the most exactly remembered message. Never losing his temper or raising his voice, he went out of his way to damp the boy's naturally exuberant spirits.

"I must implore you not to whistle, Dickens," he said one evening when they were left alone in the office. "Whistling in itself is not wrong, but I am afraid that in your case it is an indication of levity. Are you sure that you take a deep enough interest in the serious things of life? Every time you stop yourself from whistling will be a victory for your better self."

A few months of this reduced Charles to despair. He

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plucked up courage to suggest to Blackmore that his hours were almost exclusively passed in the dulllest routine and that, for all his title of junior clerk, he was little more than an office boy. The lawyer consulted with his subordinate and requested him to give Charles more responsible duties. This did not improve their relations.

Had Charles been less sensitive and impatient, the clerk might have wearied of tormenting him. But patience was a quality which he utterly lacked. Though his work now became more varied, the Law filled him with disgust. He had no aptitude for detail, no power of concentration on what bored him. He felt out of his element and blamed everything but himself for his disappointment.

The other clerks in the office appeared to him little superior to the Bob Fagins and Poll Greens of blacking factories. Most of the young men were vulgar and flashy, their seniors broken by poverty and drink. All strove to placate the chief clerk, which made them doubly disagreeable to Charles.

His only close friend in the office was Potter, a tall, cadaverous youth with a pock-marked face framed in lank black hair. He affected a flowing cape with wooden buttons, a wide-brimmed hat, a high stock and dirty linen, and it was his ambition to be mistaken for a tragedian. Charles found him an appreciative companion, and welcomed his advances. More than a little stage-struck himself, he partly adopted Potter's habits. They visited the theater nearly every night, pushing their way into the cheap seats. They talked stage, dressed stage, lived stage and tried to look stage.

"How weary, stale and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this office," remarked Potter one evening, striking an attitude, as Charles, who had been left as usual to complete a task, locked the door behind them.

"'Must we then for ever slave, and serve a foul barbarian knave,'" quoted Charles in reply. "'Shall we never rend our chains, and take the freedom of the plains?'"

"Fain would I don the buskin and tread the boards."

"I, too; but wishing won't get us an engagement."

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"Had we money," said Potter, "we might buy experience at the private theaters. Think—only to play Othello for three pounds ten, or a minor part for five shillings!"

"Where's the money?"

"Thou art young, Charles. Yet, when I was of thy tender years, a distant light beckoned me toward riches."

"Its name, prithee?"

"The goddess Shorthand! For months I wooed her, but, alas, in vain. Perchance thou might'st be more fortunate. Ruminates upon it, tender stripling.—Here our ways part."

"Stand not upon the order of thy going," replied Charles. "Good night."

The idea which Potter had put into his head commended itself increasingly as the weary days passed. He consulted his employer.

"An admirable suggestion, Dickens," said Blackmore. "I have watched you at your work; and frankly, I do not think the routine of our office suits you. You think us all dull dogs, eh? You work well enough—I make no complaint—but you don't progress. You need more scope. By all means try to learn shorthand; if you become proficient, I will give you as much work in the courts as I can."

Thus encouraged, Charles bought a half-guinea primer of shorthand on his way home that evening. For months he slaved at his new occupation, setting aside all his spare hours to it, shunning Potter, even neglecting the theater. It seemed incredibly difficult—as, not being phonetic, it was—but at last he mastered it.

Blackmore kept his promise, sending him into court to report cases in which the firm acted, and soon other solicitors approached him to undertake work for them. When Charles again sought his advice, Blackmore urged him to set up as a shorthand reporter.

John, who had succeeded in his intention to be a journalist and was now a reporter on the *British Press*, approved his son's new venture.

"Speech," he assured him, "may be silver, but shorthand is golden."

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He poohpoohed his wife's tearful objections to Charles' leaving the solicitor, and discovered an office for the infant business in Bell Yard, Doctors' Commons.

"This location," he explained, "combines the advantages of a superlative address with minimum requirements in the way of light, furniture and coals."

There was, indeed, barely room in it for Charles, his table, a couple of chairs and a mirror.

To him, however, it was a palace, for he was his own master. Neither family cares nor the tyranny of Blackmore's chief clerk could follow him there. All day he took notes in court, and transcribed them by candle-light at night in his tiny office. The work was exacting, but he found it delightful. He saw himself now truly launched toward the prosperity which filled his dreams.

A more solid proof came at the end of his first week of independence, when he found that, after paying his rent and tipping the portress, he put a pound in his pocket, five shillings more than he had ever earned in Blackmore's office.

Gradually he extended the scope of his work. Solicitors called him to their offices to record important consultations. Finding him discreet and accurate, they employed him to take down witnesses' statements, from which counsel prepared their pleas. All this meant more labor, but also more money.

The Dickens' household, now increased by yet another son, was in the throes of an unusually violent financial convulsion. John disappeared for weeks together. Mrs. Dickens nursed the new baby in floods of tears, suspecting every caller to be a sheriff's officer in disguise. It was fortunate that Charles began to find his feet and accepted more and more of the responsibilities which John could not sustain.

He was seventeen now, and old beyond his age. He looked a boy no longer. John's firm chin, mobile lips, high forehead and arched brows were all reproduced and refined in him. He was developing many of his father's characteristics. Like John, he gave much attention to his clothes. Like John, he was lively and talkative, insistent on dominating

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the company and the conversation, laughing loudly at his own jokes. He was easily flattered and as easily offended, impatient of argument and ridicule. He affected the manner of a man-about-town, smoked more cheap cigars than were good for him, and drank more copiously than was prudent.

One evening he and Potter, his friend in Blackmore's office, with whom he had resumed cordial relations, entered the Rainbow Tavern in Fleet Street. A group of medical students, who knew them both, called them to join their table.

"It's odd, damme, that you should order kidneys," remarked one of these to Charles. "I was dissecting a pair of 'em all afternoon."

He gave details of this occupation, which considerably diminished Charles' appetite.

"Quiet, please, gentlemen!" cried the landlord, hammering on a table. "Silence, please, for the world-renowned Tyrolean singers, fresh from their native valleys and mountains!"

He indicated three quaintly dressed foreigners, who had just entered. One played some chords on his zither, while his companions sang. Their yodeling excited the students to imitation, in which Charles and Potter joined, refreshing themselves at the same time with strong porter.

"Two goes of your best Scotch whisky, waiter, and two of your very mildest Havanas," ordered Charles a little later. "Will you gentlemen join us?" he asked the students.

These also ordered whisky and Havanas, but asked that their cigars not be mild.

As the drink mounted to their heads, two of them endeavored to disconcert a diner at a neighboring table by discussing how he would look on the dissecting-table. Their victim was a stout but youngish man, with impudent features and very bright blue eyes. He suffered them in silence for some time; then, losing patience, he jumped to his feet.

He was not tall, but his voice carried, and the whole company turned toward him when he cried, "Mr. Landlord, sir, no one likes laughter better than I, as the murderess observed v'en she had hysterics on the scaffold. But there's a limit. The public says that Sam Vale's funny on the stage, but now

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I find I'm as amusing off it. These 'prentice sawbones have been cuttin' me up like a carcass o' meat, and I didn't wish to cut up rough. But I've stood enough, as the sentry excused hisself v'en he fell asleep on duty."

Charles intervened. "Not one of us recognized you, Mr. Vale," he said, "though we've all applauded you often at the Surrey Theater. I hope you'll forgive a bad joke, and allow us to drink your health."

"Let's be friends, as the fox observed to the chicken," said the famous little comedian, sitting down beside Charles. Ever since he had played the part of Simon Spatterdash in Beazley's musical farce, *The Boarding House*, he had adopted the style of speech used by that character, and his absurd similes had become popular as "Sam Valeisms."

Charles saw his opportunity to ask the question which tormented Potter and himself.

"What chance has a young man on the stage to-day, Mr. Vale?"

"That depends," replied the actor, "as the highwayman ree-marked v'en he saw his brother's body hung in chains. I recommend no one to try it."

"I suppose it must be difficult at first," suggested Charles.

"At first, artervard, *and* all the time," said Vale. "What do you think I earned with Nicholson's company at Portsmouth? Eighteenpence a week, and find yourself."

"One has to learn, of course," Charles admitted. "How did you discover your gift for comedy?"

"By a process of ee-limination, as Guy Fawkes said v'en he entered politics. I tried my hand at everything. Once I played tragedy opposite Mrs. Jarman——"

"The Mrs. Jarman of Covent Garden?" asked Charles incredulously.

"The werry same, sir. At Bath it was. The manager threw me out o' window, and I went to Norwich to play Pantaloon. The audience groaned, the second time I came on. 'Don't you like my Pantaloon?' I asks 'em. 'No, vee don't,' they shouts. 'No more do I,' I says, and I gave up pantomime and stuck to farce."

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"Do you think I might have a chance, sir?" Potter asked.

"You'd get a trial as the apothecary in *Romeo* on your face alone," said Vale, examining him. "But whether you'd be acquitted or not, I couldn't say?"

"And I, sir?" inquired Charles.

"If your heart's set on it, my lad, you might do worse than try. You've good looks and spirit—that goes a long way. Your eddication would give you an advantage I never had. What you need is experience—as the philosophic widower observed to the girl as sued him for breach of promise."

The actor shook hands and returned to his table. Charles' head whirled with excitement. Sam Vale, the great Sam Vale, had, he persuaded himself, admitted that a future lay before him on the stage!

Forgetting the medical students, he and Potter discussed the actor's advice. Viewed through the mixture of brandy, porter and whisky which they had drunk, their stage careers seemed already established.

Charles suggested that they should go half-price to Covent Garden. As he rose, the waiter brought him the bill for the whole table. It was more than he could afford, but he paid it ostentatiously, threw the waiter a generous tip, and walked out arm in arm with his crony, singing:

"A clerk I was in London gay,
Jeremy, Jeremy-linkum-feedle,
I went in boots to see the play,
Jeremy, Jeremy-doo."

They arrived in the Gallery in the middle of the last piece. Mrs. Jarman's acting excited them only to howls and groans, which so annoyed the rest of the audience that they quickly found themselves ejected into the street.

"Let us pledge the future in yonder wine-vaults," said Potter. "The night is young. Wilt drain a bumper?"

"It's time I vos off, as the jockey said v'en the runaway horse came to the precipice," replied Charles, who found

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Sam Vale's peculiar style of conversation infectious. "Well, just one, if you insist."

They drank not one glass, but three or four. Then, since Charles felt unequal to walking home, they staggered back to Bell Yard.

"Spurred on by the Vale of—laughter, I am determined to don the buskin," announced Potter unsteadily.

"So am I," cried Charles, swaying on a chair. "Whenever I visit the theater I know I have the making of an actor in me. All I need is—what is it?—oh, yes, experience."

"What about the private theaters?" Potter suggested.

"I want to be paid for acting, not to pay for it," Charles replied. "Let's start a company of our own. When we've something worth showing, we'll invite a manager to see us."

They discussed various pieces in which Charles was to play the hero, Potter the villain, Fanny the heroine, and their friends the minor parts. The difficulty was to find a stage, and Potter was about to leave in despair, when a resounding knock at the street door surprised them.

"It can't be for me," said Charles. "Nobody would call on me at half past two in the morning."

Knock followed knock, and the portress, grumbling sleepily, stumbled down-stairs. She returned a minute later, and flung open Charles' door.

"Who is it at this hour?" asked Charles, who found it difficult to turn his head.

"Your progenitor, Charles," said John, entering the room, as Potter quietly left it. "I chanced to observe that your window was still suffused with illumination."

"Why on earth are you out at this time of night, father?"

"I have been entrusted with responsible duties at Westminster. Although the witching hour of midnight has long since chimed, the Mother of Parliaments protracts her labors when the common weal demands such a sacrifice. The House of Commons has only just risen, and I am on my way home."

"What have you to do with the House of Commons?"

"I am now its interpreter to my fellow citizens, my boy, the channel by which its voice filters to an expectant public

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through the *Mirror of Parliament*, that admirable journal which your uncle John Barrow has lately founded. I am a reporter in the Gallery. Your surprise is unflattering. The profession of ordinary reporting, I have long felt, is beneath my intellectual gifts, but to chronicle the proceedings of the Mother of Parliaments to her foster-children, the public, is no unworthy calling."

"But, father, you know no shorthand."

"Not one man in three in the Gallery possesses shorthand, my dear boy. Nor should I consider myself justified in employing it, since my aim is, not slavishly to reproduce, but to embellish the speeches of the members. To-morrow evening you shall read my account of the debate on foreign affairs, at which I have just assisted. 'What eloquence!' you will exclaim. 'What fire! What wit! What an outpouring of the divine afflatus!' Mine, my dear boy, all mine. The names of the speakers and the side they spoke on—nothing more will remain of their efforts."

"I congratulate you," said Charles.

"Thank you," replied John simply. "The purpose of my visit—apart from wondering if you have in your possession a drop of brandy and some cold water (ah, thank you, my dear boy)—is to suggest that you join me in this congenial occupation."

"My own work——"

"Your own fiddlesticks," cried John. "I discerned to-night that one among my colleagues—he is employed by the *Sun* newspaper—is unable adequately to discharge his duties. The charms of Bacchus have wooed him from his allegiance to Calliope. Only yesterday, I am informed, he recorded a debate which never transpired, on a subject which by no stretch of the imagination could ever have been discussed. His die is cast. He has slipped up on the orange-peel of calamity. Opportunity opens her arms to you. Embrace her!"

As Charles walked home, supported by his father, he considered the suggestion. Newspaper work in the Gallery, he knew, was better paid and more interesting than reporting

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the Law Courts. If, by good luck, he could obtain a permanent post in the Gallery, he would be able to give up all his other work, and devote his mornings to preparing for a stage career.

Next day, therefore, he called at the *Sun* office and, after waiting an hour, obtained an interview with the editor, whom he asked for a post as a Parliamentary reporter. He explained that he was an expert shorthand writer, and had already enjoyed considerable experience as a journalist—though he did not add that this experience consisted only of bringing one or two reports of fires and street accidents.

The editor welcomed his arrival, for he had on his desk a score of angry letters about the inaccurate reports supplied by John's drunken acquaintance. Charles was tested for shorthand and listed as a supernumerary, to be called on whenever an important debate overwhelmed the resources of the regular staff.

He was disappointed, for he had hoped for a full-time appointment. He consoled himself with the thought that the speed and accuracy of his shorthand would quickly win him promotion to the permanent staff of the newspaper.

The editor soon sent for him. Sir Robert Peel, the Home Secretary, was expected to make the speech of his life in moving the highly controversial Catholic Disabilities Bill, and Charles was instructed to take down as much as possible of the speech, not for publication, but to check the efforts of the other reporters.

John, who was to report it for the *Mirror of Parliament*, piloted his son into the House on the appointed evening, through a mob of people who had waited all day for admission.

Suddenly the crowd ceased jostling and shouting, and Charles saw the attendants make way for an elderly man, whose height was emphasized by his leanness and upright bearing. The beaked nose jutting from a narrow face, the small shrewd eyes, the high forehead, short gray hair and tufts of close-cropped side-whiskers, all reminded Charles of a long-legged wading bird. He wore a dark blue coat and

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extremely tight blue trousers strapped beneath his boots, while a choker and a high-cut white waistcoat with gold buttons set off the grimness of his sallow countenance. Charles did not need his father's whisper to tell him that this was the great Duke of Wellington, the victor of Waterloo and now Prime Minister.

When he had passed, John led his son into the back row of the Gallery, reserved for reporters, and, as the unprivileged crowd scrambled into the better seats, Charles surveyed the Commons. The Chamber was packed. Members, unable to find room on the benches, bunched in every corner. A roar of conversation shook the smoking chandeliers.

"Behold the Mother of Parliaments! Remarkable female, ain't she?" said John, with a wave of his hand.

"Who is that miserable little man with the big head and no neck, standing at the table?" asked Charles.

"Hush, my dear boy," whispered his father. "Lord John Russell is the tribune of the people and the standard-bearer of Reform."

"And the ugly man beside him, all hair and whiskers, in the loud plaid trousers?"

"He is the great Mr. Brougham; a coming man, my dear Charles."

"That genial, cynical fellow opposite Russell seems pleased with himself."

"Lord Palmerston is, I understand, of a complacent cast of character," answered John. "I have observed, by the way, a strange correspondence between physiognomy and politics. Reform goes with ugliness and eccentricity; reaction with cheerfulness and good looks."

A member marched toward the Speaker's chair, followed by attendants carrying bundles. He said something, but no one listened.

"Why don't they keep quiet?" asked Charles.

"Because they are waiting for Peel," his father replied. "That was a mere petition from the public for or against the Bill. There's Peel rising now, on the Treasury bench."

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A plump rosy man, neatly dressed, stood at the table. He made an inaudible remark and sat down, while a clerk read out a paper. Redoubled shouts, yells and catcalls rent the air, with a wild wailing scream overtopping all.

"An Irish member," John explained to his startled son.

On a back bench two members came to blows, and were pulled apart by their neighbors. Peel rose again, smiling with deliberate unconcern. There came a break in the storm of voices, and he began to speak in rich resonant tones.

"I rise," he said, "as a Minister of the King and, sustained by the just authority which belongs to that character, to vindicate the advice given to His Majesty by a united Cabinet."

Pandemonium broke out. Cries of "Hear!" mingled with shouts and ironical laughter.

Charles was amazed: the House, which was the pattern of assemblies the world over, seemed like a mob of undisciplined boys. He strained his ears to catch Peel's voice.

"Removal of the civil disabilities affecting our Roman Catholic fellow subjects," he heard.

Again members yelled and shrieked, waving their arms in the air. Again the weird Irish yell rang out. A shabby, sour-faced clergyman, sitting immediately in front of Charles, turned to him.

"He's anti-Christ," he hissed.

Charles soon settled to his work, though he had to write at breakneck speed and without any support for his pad but his knee. The constant storms of interruption came therefore as a relief. Whenever Peel's voice ceased, waiting for the noise to abate, he could rapidly correct his last few paragraphs. His ears were tuned to catch one sound alone, Peel's voice booming through the hazy atmosphere.

"I am aware," the speaker continued, "that the subject is surrounded by many difficulties, which are increased by the relation in which I myself stand to the question."

"He's a turncoat," said the clergyman, turning round again. "Hasn't he always sworn to oppose this Bill of Belial?"

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"Be silent!" cried John furiously, seizing the man's arm. "My son is recording the Home Secretary's words for posterity. You speak again, sir, at your peril!"

Between interruptions, Peel reviewed the whole controversy, his own record in it, and the reasons for his change of front.

At times his voice dropped till Charles could barely distinguish it. He filled the gaps in his notes as well as he could; his wrist grew numb, his feet went to sleep and his back ached with bending.

Peel was fighting the hardest battle of his career. He was advocating a measure which he had hitherto bitterly attacked, and which many of his Party still opposed. He sought to push through the Opposition's proposals without allowing it any credit for them. Only a constant difficulty in disposing of his hands showed his tension; he rubbed them together, clasped them behind his back, fidgeted with his fingers; but his smile remained.

He chose his tactics cleverly. By speaking for more than four hours, he did more than fire his hearers physically; he persuaded them that his case was much stronger than it was in reality.

He hypnotized the House. Interruptions ceased; the Irish howl was hushed; even the indignant clergyman in front of Charles drooped into a doze.

At last Peel gathered himself for his peroration. To Charles the speech seemed to have lasted for ever. Compelled to take occasional rests, he had long since lost the thread of its argument.

"I know I might have taken a more popular and more palatable course," cried Peel in a voice of thunder, "more popular with the individuals in concert with whom I long thought and acted, and more palatable to the constituents whom I have lost. But I have consulted for the best for Protestant interests and our Protestant establishments. I trust that, by the means now proposed, the moral storm may be lulled into a calm, the waters of strife subside, and the elements of discord be stilled and composed."

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"Delicious metaphor!" murmured John.

"But if," Peel added, hammering the table with clenched fist, "the Catholics seek to turn equality into superiority, we shall enter the field with the full assurance of victory, backed by the unanimous feeling of all classes of society in England, by the firm union of orthodoxy and dissent, by the applauding voice of Scotland, and by the good wishes and prayers of every free man, in whatever clime and under whatever form of government!"

He fell back in his seat, exhausted but still smiling.

Charles let his note-book drop. He sat heedless of the cries and counter-cries of members, of John's cheers, of the dingy clergyman's hysterical screams about the Gordon Riots and the Scarlet Woman.

John, who had not taken a single note, led his weary son through the seething lobbies into the street.

"Let us hasten, my dear boy," he said cheerfully, "to your chambers, where perhaps you will be kind enough to refresh a father's memory of the consummate flow of oratory which we have been privileged to hear. If you oblige me by reciting the more pregnant of Peel's periods, I can make a judicious selection of them for the edification of the *Mirror of Parliament's* readers."

Charles now understood one reason why John had urged him to enter the Gallery.

Revived with brandy and a hot kidney pie, he "obliged" his father, and aided him to write his account of the great speech.

As they walked wearily homeward, long after midnight, John broke into a rhapsody.

"How fortunate, how truly opportune, my son," he exclaimed, "that your first visit to our Senate should have coincided with the delivery of an oration which combined brilliance, audacity and eloquence in so unsurpassed, so superlative a degree! With what masterly cunning Peel justified his change of front."

"You mean," said Charles contemptuously, "that he advocated a measure which he has opposed for years?"

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"Exactly, Charles, and thus turned the tables on the Opposition. He's a veritable Cicero—as artful as a wagon-load of monkeys. Tell me, my dear boy, what is your impression of the Mother of Parliaments?"

"I think she's a humbug!" replied Charles, with a jaw-breaking yawn.

CHAPTER FIVE

MISS MARIA BEADNELL was a banker's daughter, and lived in Lombard Street. Her new admirer, Charles Dickens, had called her a "pocket Venus," and, as she gazed at herself in the hall mirror, she echoed his opinion. She smiled at the reflection of her piquant face, and lifted a slender arm artfully to disarrange a curl beneath the green ribbons of her hat. The "pocket" notion, however, seemed rather absurd, for she was taller than Charles; but the inaccuracy, she decided, was of no consequence. Her maid helped her into a smart green merino cloak, which still revealed a glimpse of the raspberry dress with its coquettish black velvet points at the neck, and handed her a pair of green gloves.

The anticipation of Charles' torrent of compliments and sighs consoled Maria's conscience for making yet another assignation with him, under the pretext of matching a ribbon in St. Paul's Churchyard.

"Come, Daphne!" she called to her spaniel and, followed by the maid, ran down the steps into Lombard Street.

They passed the great bank next door, of which her father was manager, and walked briskly down Cheapside toward the Cathedral. Under its walls stood the impatient Charles, a short trim figure in a blue surtout, his smart trousers strapped over pointed boots. A soft black neckerchief and a round blue hat of almost military shape framed his lively features and his long brown curls.

"I have only this very moment left the Courts, Miss Beadnell," he said, though he had been waiting half an hour. "The one thought in my mind, as I listened all the morning to the dull stupid pleading, was that soon I should gaze upon your beautiful countenance."

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"I'm sure that's very flattering of you, Mr. Dickens, and the Courts must be tedious indeed, if all you tell me about them is true," replied Maria. "But I suppose you'd find any place tedious, for you are so bright and cheerful. It must be dreadful for you to be shut up with those stuffy old lawyers like a bird in a cage."

"What sort of a bird?"

"I'm sure I don't know. No, don't laugh at me; I am trying to think which you remind me of."

"An eagle? A canary?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Dickens. Sometimes, you know, you're rather like a raven, so perky and pleased with himself. When you're sulky, as I see you are now, you remind me of a chicken which has been out in the rain—the way you hold yourself, with your shoulders back and your head in the air. I hope you don't mind."

"Do you mean that I crow?"

"Oh, dear me, no, Mr. Dickens, although you do sometimes, don't you? Don't be cross; it's very proper for a young man to stand up for himself. So pa always says. I do wish you would get yourself introduced to pa and ma, so that you could come and call on us. Then we could meet at home without having to come here and pretend to be shopping. I'm sure pa would be very pleased to know you as you take down speeches in Parliament; he's so interested in everything they do there. But you don't go to Parliament every day, do you?"

"Only about once a month at present, I'm afraid. But next session I hope to be there each day. The editor of the *Sun* says that my shorthand is much more reliable and quicker than anybody else's. Sooner or later he will have to engage me permanently."

"Then you'll be rich?"

"Not rich, but able to prepare for the career which I have planned to make me rich. You see, Miss Beadnell, I intend——"

Maria's attention wandered. She caught Charles by the sleeve.

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"Do look at those gloves," she exclaimed. "Don't you think they're a sweet color? Come, Mr. Dickens, I know you have a pretty taste in ladies' dress; do advise me."

"I vow, Miss Beadnell," replied Charles, irritated at her lack of interest in his plans, "that I have never yet advised a lady on her dress. If you think they are pretty gloves, they must be."

"You're a great tease, Mr. Dickens. I'm sure you've quizzed many a poor girl to distraction already. Well, never mind the gloves now; I'll go in and look at them another time, when it isn't such a pleasant day for walking. Don't you think it's a very pleasant day?"

"I do indeed, since I am with you. As I was saying, my future is all planned. It is my intention——"

"Why are we crossing the road, Mr. Dickens? This is the better side."

"The other side is less crowded."

"It isn't, and I do so want you to look in the windows of Warren's blacking factory and read the clever poems."

"I find the—er—smell of blacking quite overpowering, Miss Beadnell. It makes me feel faint. Please let us cross."

"It's rather an agreeable scent, *I* think," said Maria. "How odd you are! But I suppose you must have your own way."

They crossed.

"There!" she said, "now I hope you're satisfied. Poor Daphne was nearly run over by a coach; if she had been, I should never, never have forgiven you."

"I should never have forgiven myself,—Maria,—dear Maria."

"Hush! I shall go home at once."

"But I love you—don't turn away! I worship you with every fiber of my being, with every breath I draw, with every particle of affection of which I am capable."

She tapped his arm with her muff.

"You're a bold, forward young man. You know you oughtn't to talk to me like that."

"I think of no one and nothing but you. When I am

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away from you, my mind dwells on your beauty, your voice, the touch of your hand. I picture your face, your eyes, your dimples, your curls, your dress, your muff—why, I even dream of Daphne.”

“Daphne? I shall be jealous.”

“Maria,—may I call you Maria, now that I have told you how I adore you? Maria, I can’t live without you. I could not continue to live, if it weren’t that I sometimes meet you and talk to you and walk with you. My whole existence, all my joy in life, all my hopes and ambitions are bound up in you. You are the star which inspires me.”

“Really, Mr. Dickens, you ought to play the lover on the stage. I’m sure all the ladies would applaud you.”

“So they shall! That is what I wished to tell you, dear Maria. I’m determined to be an actor.”

“I shouldn’t want to know you, if you went on the stage. I’m sure pa would never let you call on us, if you were an actor.”

“Was not Shakespeare an actor, and Garrick? Would your father refuse to allow Kemble or Kean or Macready into his house?”

“That’s different. They are ever so famous,” said Maria doubtfully.

“So shall I be. I practise now for hours every day—how to enter a room and leave it, how to sit down in a chair and rise from it——”

“And how to pay pretty compliments?”

“I learn speeches out of plays. I can repeat hundreds of lines, and songs, too.”

“Pa wouldn’t mind that. He likes music after dinner. There’s a gentleman—he often comes to dine with us—whom pa always asks to sing. You should see the expression he puts into the words. He has a very nice voice too, and I play the harp when he sings—— Oh, you silly boy, I know what you’re thinking. He doesn’t come to see *me*; he is in love with my sister Anne. He’s a clerk in pa’s bank, and I think, Charles,—may I call you Charles?—you would like him. And Charles,—you see I call you that quite naturally

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now, isn't it odd?—the other gentleman who wants to marry Margaret, my eldest sister, has a lovely voice too, and sometimes we all sing together and play charades."

"Then why," asked Charles, "should your father object to me if I went on the stage?"

"Because that's different. They aren't professional actors and don't put horrid paint on their faces and meet actresses. Charades are genteel."

"Suppose, Maria, I start a company for private theatricals, do you think you would take part?"

"I don't think pa would let me do anything like that, but he might not mind if Mr. Kolle and Mr. Lloyd—those are the gentlemen I was telling you about—did. Why don't you try to meet Mr. Kolle? You could walk into the bank and pretend to be a merchant who wanted to deposit a fortune, and ask for Mr. Kolle and get into conversation with him, and he would bring you to call on us. Of course, I should pretend not to know you, but—— Oh, there *is* Mr. Kolle!"

In the charm of each other's company they had passed St. Paul's again and were nearly at Maria's home. A tall, serious young man in dark clothes approached them.

"Taking Daphne for an airing, Miss Maria?" he said, raising his hat and affecting not to see Charles.

Maria blushed and Charles tried to look nonchalant.

"Mr. Kolle," she explained, "this is Mr. Charles Dickens, a friend of mine."

"I fancy I have seen you before, sir," said Kolle.

Maria started, but Charles' reply reassured her.

"Are you not often in the pit at Covent Garden?"

"Frequently, Mr. Dickens," said Kolle. "You too are a student of the drama?"

"Charles—Mr. Dickens I mean," Maria broke in, "is ever so interested in the stage. He knows whole plays by heart. And he writes down all the speeches in Parliament, and is far the best reporter in the Gallery."

"Shall I see you to your door, Miss Maria?" asked the clerk, to break an awkward silence.

"Thank you, Mr. Kolle." She held out her hand to

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Charles. "Good-by, Mr. Dickens," she said, "I trust we shall meet soon.—Write to me through my maid again," she added in a whisper.

"Good-by, Miss Beadnell," said Charles. "Please try to remember some of the speeches I have recited to you this afternoon. I trust you approved the sentiments in them."

He raised his hat, seeking a pretext to linger in her company. He was fortunate, for at that moment an extraordinary object lumbered down the street toward them, followed by a laughing crowd.

"Whatever can it be?" cried Maria. "Is it a carriage? There are people sitting on it, but I can't see the horses. Look! Steam's coming out of it, and it's making the strangest noises. Is it one of those new steam-engines that pa talks about? He says it's nonsense to think they can ever take the place of horses. Whatever is it? Mr. Kolle, do you know?"

"The man in front seems to be guiding it, Miss Maria."

"I know what it is," said Charles. "I've read all about it. You are quite right, Miss Beadnell. It's the new steam-carriage which has just been invented. There's a boiler which drives it along. The man sitting at the back, pretending to admire the scenery, is really looking after the coke and water.—There, did you see? He bent down and did something to the fire."

"How quick it is!" cried Maria. "I'm sure it goes just as fast as one can walk. Do you think it can trot or canter?"

The progress of the carriage ended abruptly. Steam gushed out of the funnel, and the five passengers jumped hastily to the ground, where they were surrounded by the crowd.

A fat man, buttoned to the neck in an overcoat, despite the sunny day, and carrying a long whip, grinned at the young people.

"That's vun of them railways vot's gone off the boil, is it?" he said. "I vish my horses vos here. Split their sides a-laughin', they vould. You're werry much better off, miss, inside a coach than in vun of them newfangled contrivances."

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A hoss don't stop dead in the middle of the street and blow smoke and sparks through the top of his head. Vot's more, if a steam-injun blows up, v're are you? V'ereas, if a coach do happen to upset, *there* you are."

"He is quite right," declared Kolle, as the coachman sauntered away.

"This is only a beginning," argued Charles. "What will happen in a few years? Before we are much older, we shall travel by railroad all over the country, and these cars will drive horses off the streets. It's the march of Progress and Reform, and thank goodness for it!"

"Don't say such dreadful things, Mr. Dickens!" expostulated Maria. "I particularly want you and Mr. Kolle to be friends, and I know he won't like you if you are one of those terrible Reformers. Now I really must go home; it's very late, and ma will wonder where I am. Good-by."

Charles held her hand as long as he dared. Then, still pretending interest in the crowd round the steam-carriage, he gazed after Maria and Kolle until they were out of sight.

"Is Mr. Dickens an old friend of yours, Miss Maria?" asked Kolle.

Maria tried to look serious, but could not. Kolle smiled, too.

"Do you think, Miss Maria, that you ought to walk with a young man whom Mr. and Mrs. Beadnell have never met?"

"He's so young," she said. "He's only eighteen."

"And you are nineteen, immensely his senior!"

"Mr. Kolle, will you do me a great favor? Will you meet him and bring him to our house without saying that I know him?"

"How can I refuse anything to Anne's pretty sister?"

"Thank you, Mr. Kolle."

"Do you think your parents would approve him? They might not care for you to know a reporter."

"But he's in the Law Courts too. He takes down all the speeches and judgments or whatever they call them. So, you see, he's really very serious. And he's so amusing and lively."

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"And so susceptible? Well, I'll do my best."

Charles contrived a meeting with Kolle, and before long received through him an invitation to dine with Maria's parents. Kolle took the opportunity of warning him to respect Mr. Beadnell's anti-Reform prejudices.

"Whatever else you do," he said, "don't contradict him! He is a very calm, discreet man here in the bank, but he does rather let himself go at home. Just let him talk, and he'll like you all the better for it. I rather think, you see, that Miss Maria wants you to make a good impression."

Unfortunately the editor of the *Sun* chose the identical afternoon of the dinner to summon Charles as a reinforcement in the Gallery. He sent back word, with much misgiving, that he was too ill to go, and returned to his mirror, combing his hair and arranging the highest stock he had ever worn. At last he felt equal to facing Maria's parents, but his self-possession was taxed when Mr. Beadnell, a short man with fierce whiskers and a severe manner, asked him, even while shaking hands, for his expert opinion on the political crisis.

He replied that he hoped all would be well.

"I hope so too, sir, with all my heart," said his host gloomily. "I hope so, sir, but I can not face the future with confidence. The Dee—forgive my plain speaking—is at work."

Charles said he was sorry to hear it.

"I, too, sir, am sorry, profoundly sorry. But what can be expected when an Opposition pledged to Reform is allowed to contest the reins of power? Reform? Pah? Anarchy, sir; the Opposition is committed to revolution and ruin. What hope remains when a viper like Daniel O'Connell takes his seat in the House of Commons and pours out his trumped-up tales of distress in Ireland? Who is responsible for the distress, sir, but he?"

Charles suggested hunger and taxation.

"No, sir, neither hunger nor taxation. Catholic emancipation—that's the root of Ireland's distress, if distress there is, which I doubt. I foresaw it all, sir, as soon as the agitation

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for Papist emancipation began. Bigotry is the cause of Irish troubles—bigotry, sir.”

Kolle, to turn the conversation, remarked that disorder was spreading in England also.

“And why not, sir?” asked Mr. Beadnell turning on him. “Do not the same causes operate in this country? From bigotry we are free; the Pope’s writ does not run in England and the memory of Lord George Gordon still lives. But what about gin-drinking? That’s the point! Did you see the drunken brawlers last week who prevented the King and Queen attending the Lord Mayor’s banquet, and tried to fire the gas-pipes at Temple Bar? Drunk, sir, every man-jack of ’em! I tell you, sir, gin is the inspiration of the lower classes and Reform.”

He rolled his eyes in horror, and invited Charles to join him in a glass of sherry.

“Believe me, young man,” continued Mr. Beadnell, when he had recovered his breath, “all these newfangled theories of Reform are sending our country to the Dee. Brougham and that seditious scoundrel, O’Connell, are at the bottom of all our troubles. What are their latest demands, sir? Triennial Parliaments, universal suffrage, and—I protest it is too outrageous—secret voting. Why, sir, this last folly simply means that landlords will never know who votes right, and who wrong.”

“Quite so,” said Charles, choosing his words carefully. “If the industrial cities are given seats in Parliament, the power of the landlords will vanish.”

“I absolutely agree,” said Mr. Beadnell. “The greatness of our country rests on the rural constituencies. Take away their seats in Parliament, and hand them over to the scum of the factories—what will happen to us then? Another French Revolution, sir!”

“I hope your alarm may never be justified, sir,” said Charles mildly.

“It is already justified, sir, abundantly. I detect a steady decay in our national spirit. I am distracted with apprehension, sir, distracted with apprehension.” His voice dropped

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to a whisper. "Sometimes I wonder if even the Duke himself remains sound. He gave way on the Catholic question; is he safe on Reform?—But, hush, I hear the ladies. We must compose ourselves. You will understand, Mr. Dickens, that I have spoken confidentially. In my own house I can speak my mind as a patriotic Englishman, but, as the manager of a great bank, my position demands that my misgivings go no further. You understand me?"

"Perfectly," replied Charles, glancing eagerly toward the door.

Mrs. Beadnell and her daughters entered, and Charles was introduced. Though he pretended to be a stranger to Maria, he noticed that both her sisters glanced at him with amused interest. He tried to draw her apart, but Mrs. Beadnell bore down on him, majestic but smiling.

"Are you related, Mr. Dickin, to the Worcestershire Dickens?" she inquired.

"I am afraid not, ma'am," said Charles. "I was born in Hampshire."

"I have always understood that the Hampshire branch of the family is the more aristocratic."

"I am not sure that we are connected."

"Your dear parents, I suppose, live on their estates?"

"No, ma'am, they are in London."

"Really? How many of our best county families are taking up residence in London! I suppose they find the pleasures of the town a relief from their territorial duties. But you are very young to be a member of Parliament, Mr. Dickin."

"I have not the honor to be one, ma'am," said Charles, embarrassed from a new angle.

"Surely I was told that Mr. Dickin sits in the House?" she asked of the company.

"No, ma'am," explained Kolle. "I said that he was in the Gallery of the House. He reports the speeches for a newspaper; he does not make them."

"How very odd," commented the disappointed lady. "I can hardly believe that a young gentleman of good family

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is connected with a newspaper. They never were in my young days. I am surprised that your parents permit it."

The footman announced dinner. Charles gave his arm to his hostess; Kolle escorted Anne; Mr. Beadnell took in his eldest daughter and Maria. Charles glanced round the table, and found to his delight that, although he sat by Mrs. Beadnell, Maria was on his other side.

He was allowed little opportunity to talk to her. Mrs. Beadnell bombarded him with questions and anecdotes about the landed gentry. At the other end of the table her husband lamented the decadence of the nation and appealed to Charles, as a constant witness of the supineness of its legislators, to confirm his views. Between astonishment, irritation and amusement, Charles was glad to survive the meal without damaging himself too severely.

Afterward Maria sat at her harp, while her sisters and Kolle sang ballads.

"I suppose you sing, Mr. Dickin?" asked Mrs. Beadnell. "I believe that music is practised in the best Hampshire houses."

"I sing a little," Charles replied, "though I have not received skilled training."

"Surely you will delight us?"

Catching a nod from Maria, Charles anxiously considered what to do. He could remember only his favorite comic songs, but these, he knew, would shock his hosts.

Once more the footman saved him by announcing Miss Leigh, a girl with a pretty, mischievous face.

"Dearest Mary Ann," cried Maria, embracing the visitor. "You know everybody here, don't you, except Mr. Dickens? Mr. Dickens, this is my dear friend, Miss Leigh."

"Mr. Dickin belongs to the Hampshire, not the Worcestershire branch of the family," Mrs. Beadnell explained. "He is about to favor us with a song. All the Dickins, I know, have beautiful voices."

"Perhaps, ma'am," suggested Charles in despair, "you will allow me to recite instead. I—er—rarely sing without my notes."

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"Quite so," said Mrs. Beadnell. "I understand you. Recite to us by all means, if you prefer."

Charles fixed his eyes on Maria and, with a vague notion that it was appropriate to his situation, began Othello's story of his wooing:

"Her father loved me, oft invited me,
Still questioned me the story of my life——"

"Whose father?" asked Mrs. Beadnell.

"Her father, ma'am, Desdemona's father," Charles replied.

The name meant nothing to his hostess. He began again:

"Her father loved me, oft invited me,
Still questioned me the story of my life,
From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes,
That I have pass'd.
I ran it through, even from my boyish days
To the very moment that he bade me tell it:
Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field,
Of hair-breadth 'scapes i' the imminent deadly breach——"

He spoke with inspiration. The customary thickness of his voice vanished. His eyes, his hands, every look and gesture pointed the words. The young people thrilled and Mrs. Beadnell whispered to Miss Leigh that she would have known Charles anywhere for a true Dickin.

"Oh, the Dee!" cried Mr. Beadnell suddenly, waking from a doze to read a note which the footman brought him. He jumped to his feet and checked Charles with outstretched hands.

"My friends," he faltered, "it is not seemly that we should prolong our pleasures. Prepare yourselves for tragic news. The Government has been defeated!"

Charles felt that the not unexpected defeat of the Duke of Wellington's Government need not have cut short his recitation, but his host's emotion seemed overpowering. He

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joined Kolle and Miss Leigh in their farewells, compressing all his adoration for Maria into a violent squeeze of the hand.

"Will you see me to my brother's house, Mr. Dickens?" Miss Leigh asked him with an enchanting smile.

"Yes, do, Mr. Dickens!" cried Maria.

Charles had not the slightest desire to escort Miss Leigh; he wished to be alone with his thoughts of Maria, but it was impossible to refuse.

The streets were unusually crowded for the hour. Men walked in groups and, from the words which reached Charles' ears, all understood of the fall of the Government and spoke of the possibility of Reform being at last accomplished. It was as if war had suddenly been declared, and no one knew what would happen.

A group of drunken louts at a corner shouted, "Down with the raw lobster!" at a constable, and a cabman yelled an insult at a belated gentleman on horseback. There seemed a general movement toward the west. Charles wondered if crowds were again mobbing the Duke at Apsley House and rioting in Downing Street.

Miss Leigh, however, appeared indifferent to the excitement.

"Is this the first time you have dined with Mr. and Mrs. Beadnell, Mr. Dickens?" she asked, as they walked along. "I suppose you have never met Maria before?"

"No," replied Charles, a trifle too emphatically.

"Then it can't have been you whom I saw walking with her the other afternoon?"

"Certainly not," he replied uncomfortably.

"Don't you find her very handsome?"

"Passably so."

"Is she prettier than I am?"

"How can I answer that, Miss Leigh?"

"You won't make me jealous, Mr. Dickens. Maria tells me everything—every single thing. So you are not altogether a stranger to me, you see."

"I am afraid you're a quiz."

"Not in the least, I assure you. Just to show how much I

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know about you, I'll tell you something you would not like Mr. Beadnell to know. You're a Reformer!"

"I don't care who knows it."

"Mr. Beadnell does not approve of Reform."

"Nor I of its opponents," Charles retorted.

How he wished he had not said it!

"Ought I to tell Maria that, do you think?" inquired Miss Leigh, with a malicious smile.

He thought it best not to attempt an answer, and was much relieved to bid his companion good night at the door of her brother's house in the Minories.

A distant clamor made him hurry back, alarmed, to Lombard Street, but it was deserted. He paced to and fro past Maria's house, till he attracted the notice of the watchman outside the bank, who gruffly asked his business.

He decided to return home.

To his horror, he was caught in a mob of rioters in Fleet Street. Torches swayed above the crowd, and in their flickering light Charles saw faces distorted with evil, madness and misery. Hoarse voices roared, "Reform! Reform!" "Down with the police!" "No Wellington!" A ragged, bearded ruffian pressed Charles against a wall and forced him to echo the cries. He heard a gray-haired virago yell, "Come on, boys! Now for the West End!" and urge her followers to stone all who dared to oppose them.

He was borne painfully from side to side of the street. He could not distinguish landmarks in this pandemonium, but he knew that he had passed Temple Bar and was somewhere in the Strand.

A barefoot urchin tried to push his way between Charles' legs, whimpering that the soldiers had been called out and would shoot them down. The crowd surged westward, and the boy was trampled screaming in the gutter.

Charles remembered all he had heard of the Gordon Riots fifty years before, when for days the drunken rabble had ruled the streets, opening the prisons, burning, looting and murdering. He shuddered to think of Mr. Beadnell's bank sacked by the mob, and Maria thrown to their fury.

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Suddenly the human surge receded, and left him, weary and bruised, at the foot of the empty street. Charles hastened along it, with a hazy feeling of familiarity. A minute later he was confronted by the window of the blacking factory, which he had avoided ever since he had worked there. He turned and ran.

He found his home in darkness, and crept to his room. In his sleep he saw himself taking a benefit at Covent Garden Theater and bowing acknowledgments to Maria and her parents, while Miss Leigh incited a drunken pit to storm the stage. The noise in the theater grew so loud that he woke, and heard the maid knocking at his door to rouse him for another day's work.

"Oh, the Dee!" he muttered, in cheerful imitation of Mr. Beadnell, and tumbled out of bed.

CHAPTER SIX

"I SUPPOSE it's Genesis—isn't that the word?" remarked Mrs. Dickens gloomily, a few months after the incidents last described, "that everything begins to go wrong with us just as soon as anything goes right. Your dear father was doing so well on the *Mirror of Parliament* when this dreadful libel action was brought, and the Judge fined the paper fifty pounds and said he ought to be more careful than to reprint speeches in Parliament which contained libels."

"Father was in no way to blame," said Charles.

"Perhaps not," agreed Mrs. Dickens, "but he *would* give evidence in the case, and so all his creditors found out that he had a good position and are pursuing him like imaginary joys for the balance of his debts. What we shall do, I don't know."

"You are out of spirits, mother," said Fanny. "God will help us to win through."

"I may be very old-fashioned, Fanny," continued Mrs. Dickens, "though few people would suppose that I was old enough to be your mother, but I do not like the familiar manner in which you refer to the Deity. He is quite well able to manage without your constant interference, and it would become you better to show more Christian resignation in your own affairs."

"I do not complain, mother."

"You do, Fanny. You do worse. Ever since your scholarship at the Academy expired, and you found it difficult to obtain engagements to sing, you have assumed the air of a martyr and a centurion. Your friend, Mr. Burnett, encourages you in that state of mind, which I regard as presumptuous on his part."

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"Mr. Burnett is a very agreeable young man," interposed Charles, as Fanny blushed. "And I would not blame Fanny if she did complain, as she does not, of her employer's treatment."

"You, Charles, of all people should not seek to make Fanny dissatisfied with her present position," observed his mother. "She is fortunate to be engaged as companion to a lady who moves in the most genteel circles——"

"And who treats her worse than a scullery maid."

"One might suppose that we could afford to pick and choose, like beggars on horseback, and were very wealthy people, as we certainly ought to be, if only your poor father could overtake that golden opportunity which has for so long eluded him by the hair of his teeth."

"The *skin* of his teeth," Charles corrected her irritably.

"I can not think that it makes much difference whether it is his hair or his teeth, for your father is less well provided with both than he was when I married him in defiance of my dear pa. I am positive that Fanny's employer is a good kind blessing in disguise; and all of us have a great deal to put up with in this world, what with the price of everything, and tradesmen perpetually refusing credit, and children turning against their parents. It seems to me, Charles,—I must say it,—it seems ungrateful to your father and myself that, after all we have done for you and Fanny, you should turn and bite the hand which fed you like a dog in the manger."

"My dear mother," said Charles. "I am neither ungrateful nor unreasonable. I merely observe that Fanny is abominably treated by her employer."

"It is always the same," his mother went on. "It has always been the same, and I suppose it always will be the same. If it is not, then it will only be something different. No sooner is an excellent post found for either of you than Charles pours scorn on it, like a wet blanket at a feast. If I had my way, Charles would to-day be a partner in Warren's blacking factory, with his own carriage, well able to repay us for all the anxiety and expense we have been put to over him."

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"The factory has been sold long ago, thank goodness," said Charles. "And I wish you would not speak of it."

"It was not good enough for him," continued Mrs. Dickens, ignoring this comment. "He must wear fine clothes and trapes around after bankers' daughters, although I say—and I don't care who hears me—that one business is very like another, and blacking is no more disgraceful than banking."

Fanny smiled, but Charles was past being amused. He flung out of the room. His youngest and favorite brother, Augustus, had just been brought in from a walk, and Charles sought relief in his society. The little boy demanded a game which they had played many times before. Charles impersonated the Vicar of Wakefield, while Augustus sustained the rôle of Moses, his son.

"Good morning, Moses," said Charles, in a quavering voice.

"Not that way, not that way!" cried the child.

"Oh, no, I forgot. The old Vicar has caught a bad cold in his head. Good bordid, Boses. Is dat better, Boze; cad you udderstad be, Boze?"

Augustus shrieked his delight, and the game went on until Charles had almost recovered his spirits.

"What would you say, Boze," he inquired, "if I married and went away to live in another house? Oh, you'd be sorry, would you? But if I often came to see you, and brought you presents? That would be better, would it? Yes, I think it would. Between you and me, Boze, that's what I mean to do, but we'll keep it a secret for the present, won't we, Boze?"

They were destined to keep their secret—which gave Augustus a sense of self-importance most perplexing to Mrs. Dickens—for many months, for, although Charles' career took a step forward when Parliament reopened, his earnings were still too small to allow him to think of setting up his own establishment.

Never had a Parliamentary session been so eagerly awaited. The new Government which Lord Grey had formed was pledged to Reform. Half the country waited for the pillars of England's greatness to totter and fall; the rest saw

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the promise of liberty and belated justice. Reform divided towns, villages, even households against themselves. The passions roused by the Catholic Emancipation Bill were a passing squall compared with the present tempest. Frightened magistrates sent daily complaints of riots and disorder to Whitehall. Even the usually placid southern counties were swept by a wave of rick-burning. All men felt that Britain stood at the parting of the ways, and lent their energies to hurry her footsteps along whichever road led, in their opinion, to her salvation.

When Parliament met, the editor of the *Sun* offered Charles a permanent post in the Gallery, explaining that, although the paper could not pay him a large salary, it offered a brilliant opening. Charles gladly accepted, and the first day of the session found him a full-fledged Parliamentary reporter.

Lord John Russell introduced the Reform Bill to the House of Commons. He was entrusted with this task, though he was not in the Cabinet, as the acknowledged leader of the Reform agitation. When Charles strained his ears to catch the monotonous drone that came from the heavy head, lolling on its little body, he marveled that such a colorless creature could incarnate the ardent desires of the Reformers.

"If only people could see him as he really is," he murmured to his neighbor. "If only they weren't humbugged by the cant and hypocrisy of Parliament!" His already waning sympathy with Reform nearly vanished in the agony of reporting Russell's speeches.

It was revived, however, by the attitude of the Opposition. Charles felt that three hundred Mr. Beadnells were collected on the Tory Benches, echoing his prejudices and showing all his blindness to others' suffering and aspirations. The whole debate seemed unreal. Every speaker reiterated the arguments of his own side, till Charles scarcely needed to listen as he took down their words.

The Reformers rubbed Lord Russell's sarcasms at the green mound, the moldering stone wall, the pigsty and the gentleman's park, each of which returned members to Parlia-

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ment. The Tories repeated the arguments of Sir Robert Inglis, a member for Oxford, who proclaimed the advantages of nomination over popular election. Close boroughs, he said—he scorned to call them “rotten boroughs”—were the nursery of the nation’s statesmanship. They had returned to Parliament such men as Walpole, the Pitts, Burke and Canning.

“It is only thus,” thundered Sir Robert, “that young men not connected with large towns by birth or residence can hope to enter the House, unless they be cursed with that talent of mob-oratory which inflames the lowest and most debased passions of the populace.” Was Parliament, he demanded, to become a mere collection of pledged puppets, or was it to remain a deliberative assembly of gentlemen?

Charles thought the heroics of both sides ludicrous. The Reformers claimed to represent the voice of the people, but repudiated with horror any intention to institute the ballot or to give a vote to the masses. The Tories declared that the disfranchisement of rotten boroughs would entail national bankruptcy and revolution. Both platforms seemed to him to prove the futility of the debate and of Parliament as a whole. While the members talked—many of them rather disjointedly, after dinner—laborers starved, desperate mothers were hanged or transported for petty thefts, the rigors of the new Poor Law wrecked the homes of the workless, and in the industrial North and Midlands little children stood at machines for ten, twelve, fourteen hours a day, stunted in body and mind. The very men who were the backbone of the Reform agitation, whose catchwords the mob blindly adopted, were the employers who condemned infants to slavery and fought every movement to improve the lot of their work-people. Reform, Charles decided, was as great a humbug as Parliament.

After the seven days of preliminary debate the youth, though physically exhausted, was secure in the possession of his new post. No other reporter was so quick and accurate.

The second reading followed, and the Reform Government obtained a majority of a single vote in a division of

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more than six hundred members. Immediately came another trial of strength. An amendment was moved, by an opponent of Reform, that the number of English and Welsh members should not be diminished. This was carried by eight votes, and the Government, not sorry to appeal to the country, at once dissolved Parliament.

While the elections were tumultuously proceeding, Maria's eldest sister, Margaret, married. Charles attended the ceremony. Mr. and Mrs. Beadnell almost ignored him, and he understood that, to win Maria, he must first achieve success in the world.

He practised his acting, therefore, with doubled assiduity, until he felt confident of impressing a theatrical manager. He foresaw a meteoric rise to fame, and pictured the pride with which Maria's parents would announce the betrothal of their daughter to the famous actor, Mr. Charles Dickens.

The fulfillment of this pleasant fancy was postponed by the assembling of the new Parliament. The Reformers had secured a large majority, partly by argument, partly by such cogent methods of persuasion as smashing opponents' windows and forcing lukewarm supporters to illuminate their houses in demonstration of their enthusiasm. The Reform Bill was brought in again, read a first and second time, and sent up to the Lords.

So matters rested for that session; both Houses turned with relief to less controversial measures, and Charles had leisure for the pursuit of fame and Maria.

"I've glorious news," she announced breathlessly one afternoon, when they met at their usual rendezvous by the Cathedral. "Pa has decided that I'm to spend a year in Paris, and learn that ducky French language. Isn't it wonderful? At first pa didn't think it safe to send me, but he says there will never be another war in Europe, so I'm going next week and we're having a farewell dinner-party on Tuesday. Pa is going to invite you and your pa and ma, but, of course, you must pretend not to know anything about it."

"You are going away," said Charles miserably. "For a year?"

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"Think of all the new fashions I shall see in Paris. Mary Ann—Miss Leigh, you know—was in Calais for a month last year and she says the French are not so unpleasant as one thinks, though they do look odd with their little black beards and waving their hands about."

"How can I remain for a whole year without you, Maria? You know that I only live for these meetings with you, that only the thought of you sustains me through those dull debates in the House, that all my hopes for the future are bound up with you. If you go away, I shall be unbearably lonely."

"You can write to me. I shall say you are my cousin, if they ask where the letters come from."

"Will you answer them?"

"Of course I shall."

"Then you do love me, dear Maria? Tell me, do you love me?"

"Well, really, Charles, really, I don't know. Perhaps I do—a little."

"Then let us be engaged."

"But pa? And ma?"

"I suppose they would not agree."

"They'd be furious, and pa would forbid your coming to my party on Tuesday, I think he likes you, for he told ma the other day that you were a young man of parts, and ma said, 'What parts?' But pa's so difficult when he's angry. He wouldn't speak to any of us for a week when Margaret became engaged to Mr. Lloyd. He just stamped up and down the house, using dreadful language to the footman.—No, I won't have you laugh at pa, Charles, or I shall be very angry."

He stood silent for a few minutes, until Maria grew uneasy.

"You're not put out?" she asked him, and her hand touched his.

"No, only disappointed."

"Do you really want us to be engaged?"

"With all my heart and soul."

"Then I'll tell you a secret, only you will keep it a secret,

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won't you? I haven't told anybody at all about it, except Mary Ann."

"What is it?"

"Anne and Mr. Kolle are engaged, but they daren't tell pa and ma. Anne wears a ring that I'm supposed to have given her, though really Mr. Kolle bought it for her. The other day ma saw Anne's ring and began to have her hysterics, but pa said, 'Please don't, my dear; Anne has told me exactly where it came from.' Then ma said I was a very foolish and loving little sister to give Anne such a present."

"Can't we be engaged secretly too, Maria?"

"Wouldn't it be romantic? If you give me a ring, I won't wear it till I get to Paris. When pa comes there to see me, I can hide it until he goes away again. And every time I look at it, I shall remember who gave it to me. And you must buy a ring for yourself, and wear it on Tuesday."

The maid warned them that it was time for Maria to return. The lovers parted, and Charles trod on air at the thought that they were engaged.

"My love," said John to his wife at breakfast next morning, "I have received an epistle emanating from a Mr. Beadnell, who informs me that he is the chief executive officer of the ancient and well-connected banking house of Messrs. Smith, Payne and Smith. He proffers a cordial invitation that you and I, Elizabeth, and Charles should afford him the pleasure of our company on Tuesday evening next, to banish dull care and refresh the inner man. Have you any notion why he should distinguish us in this manner?"

Mrs. Dickens fixed her son with a suspicious eye.

"I have dined there before, father," Charles explained, "I know that Mr. and Mrs. Beadnell wish to meet you."

"Charles is in love with one of Mr. Beadnell's daughters," added Mrs. Dickens tartly.

"No, no, you must not say that. She is just a friend."

Mrs. Dickens sniffed.

"Am I to deduce, Elizabeth," John asked, "from the somewhat deprecatory expression of your countenance, that you would prefer not to grace this city magnate's board?"

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"Nothing that I say," she replied, "will weigh in the *least* with you and Charles. I am a mere syphon in this house. My wishes may be disregarded."

"My own," John went on, "this seems a golden opportunity to establish relations with one who may prove of service in rescuing the frail bark of my finances from the unsympathic rocks. Mr. Beadnell is a banker. In banking, I conjecture, reputation and character play the principal rôles; they are, so to speak, its hero and heroine. Doubtless he needs a colleague possessed of experience, determination, probity and a strong head for figures. This explains his communication."

Mrs. Dickens sniffed again, but with less decision, and John dispatched an elaborate acceptance.

Charles spent all his savings on two small rings of identical shape, one of which he placed on his finger, sending the other secretly to Maria. Then he set to work on a project by which he hoped to celebrate his new happiness and to impress the Beadnell family in his favor. It was nothing less than a lament in verse on Maria's departure, but, as he dared not make its meaning too obvious, he disguised it as a general effusion about her family circle.

He made his toilet with elaborate care on the evening of the dinner, satisfied himself that his precious poem was in his pocket and hurried from his office to fetch his parents.

When he arrived, his mother sat alone in her parlor.

"Have you forgotten where we're going this evening? You are not even ready. Whatever's the matter?"

"Your father—my poor husband!" she sobbed. "It isn't as if he didn't always think kindly of his creditors, even the ones he owes most to. But there—my dear pa always warned me what would happen."

"What *has* happened?"

"At a quarter to three this afternoon—I know it was a quarter to three, because Augustus, that annoying boy, had an attack of hiccups—your poor father was sitting in this room in the ladderback chair. Or was it that chair in the corner? I forget, but I don't suppose it matters now."

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"Do tell me what happened!" cried Charles.

"I heard a knock at the door. I thought at first it was the butcher; he usually calls in the afternoons to ask for his account to be paid, being, as he explains, busy in the mornings making out the bills. It wasn't the butcher, because he always knocks double knocks, like the postman."

"For heaven's sake, mother!"

"If you did not continually interrupt me, Charles, I should tell you, but you were always unfeeling, and lately, since you have made friends with those banking Beadles, you grow positively worse. I suppose ungrateful children are the rule nowadays rather than the conception, but I should have thought that, after all the care I have lavished on you——"

"Never mind about that now! What has happened to father?"

"He has been arrested. His creditors have led him to Cursitor Street, like a lamb to the water."

"What can we do? What about the dinner? How much is the debt?"

"I gathered that he owes it to the wine-merchant for whom he used to travel. Your father *would* engage in business dealings with that man, although I said at the time that there was too much sediment in the bottle, and my dear pa never did care for a heavy wine. Ten pounds it is, the officer said."

"Where in the world can I raise ten pounds at this time of day?" cried Charles.

He looked round the room, but nearly every article of value had already been pawned. If only he had not spent his savings on the rings! Of course, he could obtain an advance of a couple of pounds from the jeweler on his; but then he would not be able to wear it at the dinner, as he had promised Maria. And where could he obtain the rest of the money?

He thought of Kollé. Impossible! Kollé must never know the family's straits; he was too intimate with the Beadnells. His old associates at Blackmore's office? They might be able to advance him something; and Blackmore him-

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self was well-disposed toward him. If they failed him, only the *Sun* was left, but the cashier there was hardly likely to help.

No time to lose! He dashed into the street and hailed a coach. "Gray's Inn, like the devil!" he shouted to the driver.

"What a pleasant surprise, Mr. Dickens!" said Blackmore's clerk with an unfriendly smile. "We are still here, you see, plodding along after hours. Patient labor is its own reward."

"Is Mr. Potter in? Or Mr. Blackmore?" asked Charles.

"What a misfortune, Mr. Dickens. Mr. Potter has gone home, and Mr. Blackmore is in consultation. Can I be of any use to you?"

"I must see Mr. Blackmore on urgent personal business."

"If you would rather not confide in me, I don't complain. I never take offense, Mr. Dickens."

"How long will Mr. Blackmore be?"

"It's a very important consultation, Mr. Dickens, or he wouldn't still be here. I would tell you all about the case, but, of course, you no longer take any interest in the Law, do you? I fear you despise it. Do you know that every night, when I go down on my knees, I make a special plea that you may not fall into the deadly sin of pride?" The man raised his hands with an expression of pious sorrow.

Charles, furious at the delay, brushed past him, and knocked on Blackmore's door.

"What is it?" said the lawyer testily, looking up from a document he was examining with his client. "Ah, it's you, Dickens. I'm afraid I am engaged for a few minutes. Will you wait?"

"I am extremely sorry to intrude, sir," said Charles, "but if you could possibly spare me a moment.—It is very urgent."

Blackmore, excusing himself to the client, took Charles into a corner of the room. The young man explained his predicament.

"Strange world we live in, eh, Dickens? Everything topsy-turvy: fathers getting into scrapes, sons getting 'em

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out again. It was t'other way about in my young days. Reform, eh? Well, I suppose I can trust you with the money. Get my clerk to give you ten pounds! Never mind about thanking me; I'm busy."

"Beware of running into debt, Mr. Dickens," said the clerk, as he wrote out the receipt with exaggerated care. "You were always impatient, weren't you? I do hope it won't bring you to ruin. If only you had told me what you needed, I should have been delighted to lend you the money myself. I am a very poor man, and charity makes heavy calls on my little savings, but I love to serve my fellow creatures. Dear me! How provoking! You have jogged my elbow and made me blot the paper. Now I must write it out all over again."

The transaction was at length completed, and Charles hurried back to the coach. The jeweler, who was locking up his shop, advanced a couple of guineas on the ring, and Charles drove furiously to Sloman's notorious sponging-house in Cursitor Street.

His father sat with two companions, a seedy old drunkard and a flashy youth. John was smoking a cigar and mixing a bowl of punch.

"Ichabod, my son, my son!" he exclaimed. "Again you behold me sunk in the lowest pit of tribulation. In the midst of life, as I was just observing, we are in debt. Had the prophet Jeremiah known the ignominy of Sloman's sponging-house, he would doubtless have extended his Lamentations."

"Don't waste time, father!" Charles began impatiently, but John hushed him.

"Once again I have ignored the writing on the wall," he continued, "and am buffeted by misfortune's blast. I fear that the revels in Lombard Street to-night must proceed without my participation. Think of your father cowering here beneath the bludgeons of fate, my dear Charles, as you trifle with the viands; think of him moistening Barmecidal bread with suicidal tears, as you raise your brimming goblet!"

He took a pull at his glass.

"How much is this debt?" demanded Charles, as John

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wiped his lips, afterward thoughtfully placing the handkerchief to his eyes.

John turned to his companions.

"How admirable is a dutiful son," he apostrophized. "His price, as Solomon observed about a hypothetical member of the opposite sex, is more than rubies. Never since the Roman young person, whose name for the moment escapes me, sustained her imprisoned father with the nourishment ordained by Providence for the digestion of her infant babies—never, I repeat, can I recall a more elevating example of filial piety. Even the good-natured pelican who pierces her breast with her beak and revives her offspring with the vital fluid, is simply not in it. My debt, dear boy," he smiled, turning to Charles, who fumed with exasperation, "is a mere ten pounds, a bagatelle."

"And the costs is a bag o' tallow of two p'un' more," remarked the keeper of the house, who had followed Charles into the room and listened to John's remarks with admiration. "The gen'l'man said he wished to be made as happy as possible in his misery."

"Call it twelve pounds ten in all," said John. "Are you possessed of that modicum, my boy?"

Charles counted out the money, wondering if the remaining shillings would pay the coach.

"Now, for heaven's sake, let us hurry," he said. "I have a coach; there's just time to collect mother and reach the Beadnells'."

Mrs. Dickens and her husband were so much overcome by their reunion that precious minutes were wasted. At last, when Charles was reduced to an extremity of impatience, they set out for Lombard Street.

John discovered a few shillings in his pocket, and these, added to what Charles still possessed, just paid the fare.

"I began to fear you were never coming," said Mrs. Beadnell.

"A matter of pressing business detained me," John explained loudly. "Mr. Beadnell will understand me. Such, ma'am, is the unenviable lot of the man of affairs."

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Charles shook hands with his host and hostess, with Margaret and her husband, with Anne and Kolle, with Maria and, rather hesitatingly, with Miss Leigh.

Dinner was announced. John took in Mrs. Beadnell; Mr. Beadnell escorted Mrs. Dickens, and the others followed.

Charles soon perceived that the meal might not be wholly pleasant. Maria glanced at his hand, saw no ring upon it, pouted and turned her head away, leaving him to the pitfalls of Mary Ann Leigh's conversation. John, designing to impress his host, submerged him with a flood of eloquence; and unused to sit silent at his own table, Mr. Beadnell felt aggrieved. Mrs. Beadnell was disappointed to find Mrs. Dickens quite unlike the picture she had formed of her.

"I suppose, ma'am," she said down the table, "you are well acquainted with London?"

"Yes, to be sure, ma'am," replied Mrs. Dickens. "My beloved pa, now in Heaven, was formerly of Somerset House. And my cousin, Mr. John Barrow—I am sure you have heard of him; he traveled to China and reconciled the Kaffirs—is one of the secretaries to the Admiralty and every inch an auditor."

"You see a great deal of him?"

"He was present at my christening, ma'am, but we have not kept up the acquaintance."

"I am surprised that he does not visit you in the country."

"In the country?" repeated Mrs. Dickens, puzzled.

Charles tried to signal to her, but Miss Leigh was watching him intently.

"Yes, ma'am," persisted the hostess, "at your country seat. At your castle in Hampshire."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand you, ma'am," said Mrs. Dickens, bewildered. "I suppose you are thinking of Rochester Castle, which is quite near where we used to live, but I don't think it is in Hampshire—unless, of course, it has been removed."

Charles hastened to intervene.

"Did you follow the debate on the Reform Bill in the House, sir?" he asked his host desperately.

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He could not have chosen a more unfortunate subject.

"Debate, sir! I don't call it a debate. It was a disgrace to the country, a—a humiliation to all decent men."

John, who was under a hazy impression that all business men were advocates of the new measures, saw his opportunity.

"I entirely concur, sir," he boomed. "We men of affairs, sir, spurn the sycophantic slaves who lavish affection on their chains. We denounce a feudal system which is inseparably associated in our thoughts with thumbscrews, damsels in distress, drawbridges and other inconvenient anachronisms. Progress, sir, is a lovely creature."

John turned to his plate, taking the general silence as a tribute. Poor Charles gazed in agony at Maria, who dared not return his glance. Only Mary Ann Leigh smiled.

Mr. Beadnell fidgeted with his stock as if it were choking him. His face grew purple; his eyes bulged.

"Do I—am I—do I understand, sir, that you are a Reformer?" he asked John in a thick and strangled voice.

"Aren't you?" said John.

"Oh the Dee, the very Dee!" he shouted. "No, Mrs. B., I will not retract the expression, even in the presence of ladies. Is it possible, sir, that I am asked under my own roof—at my own table, sir,—by one of my own guests—if I am a Reformer?"

"I must confess," remarked Mrs. Dickens, with unprecedented tact, "that I was surprised to hear my husband putting the case for those tiresome Performers, for he is always denouncing them until, what with the children—Augustus, my youngest, is a sad trial—and my other worries, my head positively aches. I have always been subject to headaches since a child, ma'am," she explained to Mrs. Beadnell, "and my son Charles is just the same."

John endeavored to repair his mistake.

"With such terms as those I employed," he said blandly, "the mistaken creatures who sponsor the iniquitous measure to which I referred, are, I understand, accustomed to hoodwink their dupes. Such arguments—if I may so designate them, though the nomenclature is too flattering—are not

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likely to appeal for a moment, sir, to you and me, men of affairs, men of strong personal character, men of experience and probity, men with a head for figures."

"Really, sir," gasped Mr. Beadnell, not yet fully recovered, "for one moment I was under the impression that you seriously advocated those revolutionary sentiments. I apologize. A glass of wine with you, sir."

"With both ventricles of my heart, sir," replied John, glancing triumphantly at Charles.

Dinner ended and Charles begged his hostess' permission to recite a few lines which he had written especially for the occasion.

"Lines?" said Mrs. Beadnell.

"Verses, ma'am," explained Charles.

"My son is on intimate terms with at least three Muses, ma'am," added John.

"How truly delightful," said Mrs. Beadnell. "I had no idea that young Mr. Dickin was a poet, though I've always understood that our best families are poetical. Lord Byron, I believe, was one, though I ought not to mention him in front of young people. Do please recite your verses, Mr. Dickin."

Charles stroked his hair and, holding a sheet of paper in such a manner as to show that he knew its contents by heart, announced the title as *The Bank-Book*. A few introductory lines brought him to the first of his portraits:

"Mr. Beadnell's a banker; I need not have said it,
For his fame, I am sure, has brought him great *credit*."

"Eh? Oh, very good, very poetical indeed," cried the subject of this epigram. "Go on, sir, go on."

"Mrs. Beadnell, his wife, is his *principal* joy.
Her *interest's* his; her *figure's* his joy."

"My figure's what?" asked the puzzled hostess.

"His joy, ma'am," Mrs. Dickens answered sharply.

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"Their three lovely daughters are accounted a *treasure*,
To lose the first caused him of grief no small measure.
Two Miss B.'s remain, *locked away in the safe*
Care of their parents, though sad suitors chafe."

"Locked away in the safe, Mrs. B.," the banker called to his wife. "In the safe *care*. Very smart and witty!"

The poet now made reference to Daphne, the dog, which amused everybody except Mrs. Dickens, who concluded that Daphne was another Miss Beadnell of unconventional habits.

He slackened pace as he read a couplet upon Miss Leigh and her teasing ways, in which he strove to be as cutting as possible without open rudeness.

"Come, come, my lad," his host interrupted. "You mustn't be hard on Mary Ann. Never be unkind to the ladies!"

"Is Mary Ann a tease?" said Mrs. Beadnell innocently, staring at her as if Charles had called attention to some new feature in the girl's face.

Charles was sufficiently encouraged by their interest to enter boldly upon what was, to him, the most important part of the poem, both because it treated of himself, and because it represented the first public, though discreet, avowal of his love:

"Charles Dickens, poor fellow, has made a big *loan*;
He's *advanced* his whole heart—it's no longer his own.
The *loan's been renewed* for a year and a day—
Has he lost it, or will the fair *creditor* pay?"

He looked hard at Maria, and went on:

"All's well if she *meets the bill*, sooner or late,
But he's *failing* with woe at a horrible *rate*.
He thought that all banking was founded on trust—
Have bright eyes betrayed him? Then *go bankrupt* he must."

"What did he advance?" Mrs. Beadnell inquired.

"His heart, Mrs. B. He lent his heart—fell in love.
When did you say, Mr. Dickens?"

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"The loan was renewed for a year and a day, sir," repeated Charles.

"He fell in love a year and a day ago," his host interpreted.

"Did he really?" said Mrs. Beadnell. "Well, I never! Did you know, Mrs. Dickin, ma'am?"

"I have had my suspicions," replied the latter. "But, as my son has not thought fit to confide in me, I endeavor to conceal them. What he can see in her, I can't imagine, though, as he has not told me her name, I may be mistaken in her identity. I'm sure I hope I am."

Charles tried to appear unconcerned, but Maria blushed under the scrutiny of her sisters, Miss Leigh and Kolle.

Mr. Beadnell pronounced the poem very smart, while his wife entertained Mrs. Dickens with a description of various rhymes which her children had learned in their earliest years. Charles took the opportunity to converse quietly with Maria, offering her an explanation—not the correct one—why he was not wearing the ring.

Suddenly came disaster. Maria dropped her handkerchief; Daphne, the spaniel, leaped playfully across the room, and, disregarding her mistress' shrill commands, picked it up and ran away.

Maria's face turned red, then very pale. As the dog passed Mrs. Beadnell, a small round object dropped from the handkerchief and fell with a clinking sound against her foot.

"Why, I do declare," said the lady. "If it isn't a ring!"

"A ring, Mrs. B.? Show me! Maria, what's this?" cried Mr. Beadnell.

"Nothing, pa, nothing of importance," stammered the girl. "Just a little present, that's all."

"Since when have you been receiving little presents of expensive rings? Who gave it to you?—You won't answer? Do *you* know where this comes from, Anne?"

Maria's sister shook her head, while Kolle nervously moved his chair away.

"Do *you* know, Margaret?"

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His eldest daughter could tell him nothing. Mrs. Beadnell burst into tears and left the room. Mary Ann Leigh smiled, and Mrs. Dickens looked very knowing.

Charles wondered desperately what he ought to do. If he kept silence, all the blame would fall on Maria. If he avowed his gift, his host would surely never permit him to enter the house again.

"It is high time you were packed off to Paris, miss," cried Mr. Beadnell, while the youth sat undecided. "Your wickedness appals me. You have grieved your mother. I am ashamed of you."

"Oh, pa," cried Maria.

"My love," said John, "Charles, I think we should take leave of our amiable host, whose entertainment and acquaintance we have so much enjoyed. I trust, sir, that this will not be our last foregathering. I have no doubt that you wish to confer with me on a subject touching the future, as one who possesses in a marked degree those qualities of trustworthiness, experience and address which, combined with a profound head for figures—sir, you may count on me."

The hint was lost on Mr. Beadnell who, with an angry glance at Maria, bade his guests farewell. He was shaking hands with the distracted Charles, when Mrs. Beadnell burst into the room.

"I could never have believed it, never!" she cried, brandishing a bundle of letters.

"Never believed what, Mrs. B.?" her husband asked.

"I am sorry to tell you," she said, "that Mr. Dickin has grossly abused our hospitality. I see from these letters, which I have discovered in Maria's bureau, that he has had the audacity to write to her and propose clandestine assignations."

"Sir!" cried Mr. Beadnell, turning to John.

"No, no," explained Mrs. Beadnell, "not *that* Mr. Dickin. His son."

"You, sir," roared her husband to Charles. "Explain yourself!"

"And kindly explain, young Mr. Dickin," added Mrs.

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Beadnell, "what you mean by stating in this letter, only the day before yesterday, that you send Maria a ring to seal the betrothal into which you have entered."

"So this," cried Mr. Beadnell, "is the meaning of your scurrilous verses about hearts and eyes and bank-books. I look upon you as a scoundrel, sir, a vagabond, an interloper, a rapsallion, a—a Reformer!"

"You are Maria's father, sir," said Charles, "and for that reason I owe you manly respect. I confess that I love your daughter and hope to make her my wife. I love her with all my soul, as no man has ever loved before; I shall love her, only her, until I die. If we have entered into secret communication, the guilt is mine. I knew that you would not yet be willing to accept me as her suitor, and therefore I resorted to secrecy. Maria is blameless."

"Blameless, indeed?" cried Mrs. Dickens. "Did she keep the assignations you sent her? I suppose that was one of them which dropped out of her handkerchief. Hasn't she time and again made you late for dinner and catch colds in your head, walking about with her?"

"Do you speak of my daughter, ma'am?" inquired Mrs. Beadnell.

"Whom else, pray?"

"Then, ma'am, kindly keep your remarks until they are asked for. And let me tell you, ma'am, that I don't believe you ever had a castle."

"Why on earth should I have a castle, my good woman?"

"I'm not your good woman, you insulting person!" Mrs. Beadnell retorted. "My love, we have been basely deceived. These people are not what they pretend."

"Indeed, ma'am, the fault is yours," cried Charles. "You were pleased to imagine for my family a higher rank than I ever claimed for it. You deceived yourself."

"That is enough, Mr. Dickens," Mr. Beadnell interposed. "Mrs. B. is incapable of deceiving herself. I ask you, sir, and your father, whose views on Reform I now regard with the utmost suspicion, immediately to withdraw from this house, and to leave her parents to deal with Maria."

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Charles bowed and left the room, followed by his mother, who bore herself with frigid dignity.

John made a despairing effort for harmony.

"It is with boundless regret," he announced, "that I have witnessed this incident. A father's heart bleeds for you, sir——"

"Don't let it presume to, sir," said Mr. Beadnell.

"I can not staunch it," explained John, shaking his head. "There is a bond of feeling which unites us. We fathers are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward—especially when they are young sparks. My son is a fine fellow, sir, but, in the presence of such a monument of beauty as your daughter, I fear he has been rash. Once we were young ourselves. Consider, sir; be reasonable!"

"I am always reasonable," stormed Mr. Beadnell. "I was never more completely reasonable in my life. But you, sir, you and your long-haired, mealy-mouthed, overdressed puppy of a son, you are not reasonable; you're treasonable. Yes, sir, treasonable—a brace of seditious, impertinent, long-winded, emancipating, vote-by-balloting, one-man-as-good-as-anothering, disloyal, revolutionary Reformers!"

Charles and his mother were some distance along the street when John descended the steps of the house. He was closely followed by Mr. Beadnell who pushed the footman on one side, and, to the scandal of the watchman, shouted, "Reformer, Reformers, Reformers, Reformers!" after them at the top of his voice, till they were out of sight.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LOVE-SICK, lonely, tortured by uncertainty, Charles waited for news of Maria. Surely she would write to him? It was not difficult for her in Paris to post a letter, sending him word of her love and suggesting how he might write to her. Day after day passed, but still no letter came. He wrote numberless pages to her, kept them for a while and, with no knowledge of her address, tore them up.

He persuaded himself that he suffered more than any other lover since the beginning of time. Occasionally he was surprised to find himself cheerful but, even then, the thought of Maria made him check his laughter and relapse into melancholy.

In the depths of self-pity he imagined himself suffering a hundred deaths for love of Maria. In all these day-dreams he died happy, for he died in her arms. Sometimes he rescued Mr. Beadnell from the fury of Reform mobs at the cost of his own life, and Maria, weeping over his body, refused to be comforted. Sometimes a runaway coach thundered past him as he crossed the street, wrapped in somber memories of his lost happiness; in a second he flung himself at the horses' heads and the coach stopped with a lurch of its wheels over his mangled corpse. Maria, the passenger, would mourn for ever the tragedy of their thwarted love.

When the cholera invaded London from the Continent and crept from the riverside through the city, he saw himself stricken by the disease on the Beadnells' door-step and carried into the house, there to breathe his last while the banker and his wife, listening to his ravings about Maria, recognized—alas, too late!—the nobility and devotion of his character.

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He met no such fate. He never found Mr. Beadnell in the hands of rioters; runaway coaches and the cholera passed him by.

Parliament met again, and he returned to the Gallery with small zest for his work. The *Sun* seemed to be declining; after a month many of its staff were transferred to a new paper, the *True Sun*. Economy was demanded by its proprietors and, before it had been in existence a week, they tried to reduce the reporters' salaries.

Such an occasion suited Charles' desperate mood. He set himself at the head of his colleagues. They went on strike and besieged the doorways of the office, in order both to impress the proprietors and to dissuade outside reporters from working on the paper. These tactics were so successful that in a few hours the project of retrenchment was abandoned.

Still Maria sent no word, and the world seemed empty. Charles determined that now or never was the time to make his fortune on the stage.

Marveling at his audacity, he waited on Bartley, the stage-manager at Covent Garden, and begged for a trial. He described himself as a natural actor, with a genius for mimicry, adding that he knew by heart nearly all Charles Mathews' monologues, and was certain that he could impress the managers with his rendering of one of these character-sketches.

Bartley looked him up and down and promised, as soon as the rehearsals for a new play were over, to send him an appointment for an audition. The letter soon came, inviting him to call at the theater and recite a piece from Mathews' repertoire to the writer and Charles Kemble, the joint proprietor of the theater.

Charles rehearsed in every spare moment. He persuaded Fanny that the stage was a decent and God-fearing profession; and she agreed to accompany his songs.

He went to bed on the eve of his audition, convinced that nothing stood between him and his success. By midnight he was feverish, and tossed on his bed in an agony of apprehension. How could he face Kemble next morning, ill and ex-

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hausted? Sleep came at last, but, when he woke, he felt a dull pain in his ear, and the mirror showed him a face ludicrously swollen.

He told Fanny in tears that the trial must be postponed, and sent her with a note to Bartley, asking to be given another chance as soon as he was better.

A week later Kemble sailed for America, and, since in his absence there was no sense in repeating the application, Charles was again left to take stock of his position. It was lamentable. Maria did not write; his attempt to go on the stage had failed, and his colleagues warned him that his position on the *True Sun* was precarious, because he had led the strike.

John disappeared from home, ostensibly on affairs of the utmost importance, but actually because his creditors were once more on his track. Guessing that the *Mirror of Parliament* could not afford to dispense with even John's erratic services at so critical a time, Charles called on his uncle to suggest that he might temporarily take his father's place, and Barrow was glad to engage him to represent the *Mirror* in the Gallery.

To celebrate this appointment, he persuaded Fanny to accompany him and their mother to Covent Garden. Who should be sitting next to them but Kolle? Mrs. Dickens refused to recognize the young man, but Charles saw no reason to visit on him the resentment he felt against Mr. Beadnell.

They chatted amicably, and Charles introduced him to Fanny. During the final interval, Charles asked cunningly for Maria's address; Kolle considered for a minute, and offered to forward any letter sent to him at the bank.

Charles could hardly wait to reach home. Arrived there, he sat down to write a passionate declaration of his love. He remembered ardent passages from letters he had destroyed, and made additions no less glowing. He compressed nearly a year of forlorn adoration into the letter, covering page after page, until his inspiration faltered, and he signed his name with a last flourish of energy. He enclosed a pressing note

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of invitation to Kolle. Would he come to dinner on any day which suited him? Charles was so anxious to see him again, and exchange views on the theater; would he come soon?

The clerk replied that the letter had been forwarded to Maria, and that he would gladly dine with him. Mrs. Dickens stormed when she learned that he was coming, but Charles insisted on her receiving his guest.

Kolle revealed that he soon expected to announce his engagement to Anne. She liked Charles, he insisted, and had often said that Maria was very fortunate to have so lively an admirer. Yes, and Maria herself, in private notes to her sister, had spoken of Charles sometimes with affection, sometimes without it; but Anne could not guess her sister's real feelings.

Such conversation as this, despite Mrs. Dickens' sniffs whenever Maria was mentioned, soon put the young men on the best of terms. Before Kolle left, he disclosed Maria's address in Paris, and Charles invited him to take part in an amateur performance which he and Fanny were preparing, with the operetta *Clari* as the principal piece. The production was to be in the New Year, when the Dickens family would move into more convenient lodgings in Marylebone. Kolle confessed an ambition for the amateur stage and gladly accepted.

Maria answered Charles' letter after a long, long delay, and declared that she would have written to him before, if she had known his address.

Paris she said was a beautiful city, where beautiful ladies wore beautiful clothes; there had been "dreddful" shooting in the streets, and demonstrations against poor King Louis Philippe—"such a *nice-looking* man and not a bit proud; we saw him this morning walking in the Tuileries and waived to him, and he *waived back*;" and finally, she expected her father to fetch her home soon after Christmas.

In a postscript she added that she still wore Charles' ring and often thought of him and Daphne.

Charles thought this letter one of the most wonderful documents ever penned, and read it a dozen times before he

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could bear to fold it away in his pocket. It was the first she had ever written to him. He posted several replies in the next few days, and ate out his heart waiting for its successor.

When this arrived after several weeks, it was brief and colorless, but definitely heralded her return to London.

Charles at once reminded her that he came of age in February, and hinted that this event should determine their future relations. Although she sent no reply, he set himself with renewed energy to the task of achieving fame, and devoted himself enthusiastically to the production of the plays which were to be performed in the drawing-room of the new house in Bentinck Street.

Rehearsals were hard to arrange. Fanny, engaged as companion to a capricious old lady, never knew when she would be free. Kolle's duties kept him in Lombard Street until the late afternoon. Charles had his work in the Gallery and the Courts. The minor characters had their own difficulties, and Charles despaired of gathering his full company together at any one time. He was none the less determined that the performances should be brilliant beyond the usual amateur standard, and worked at his cast with prodigious zeal.

The occasion of his twenty-first birthday moved his mother to tears, and his father, who had arrived again from his wanderings, to reflective soliloquy at dinner.

"Hitherto," said John, gazing at the ceiling, "it has been my duty to guide my son's toddling feet along the stony thoroughfare from the cradle to the sepulcher, whited or otherwise.—Oblige me, my love, by passing the beer!—From now on, it is possible that our positions will be reversed. It may prove Charles' pious task to melt the snow with which creeping age is powdering my locks. He will not, I confidently affirm, suffer his generously inclined but financially unfortunate old father to plod his weary way alone—except for a numerous and expensive family—down the primrose path which leads to a perpetual Guy Fawkes' Day."

And later in the evening he took his son aside, saying, "You do not happen, I suppose, my dear boy, to be possessed

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of a superfluous guinea, a guinea not earmarked to any essential purpose, a guinea which would set a seal upon the new and glorious responsibilities inaugurated by your arrival at the years of discretion."

John's interest in Charles' prosperity was further stimulated by the reopening of Parliament.

Stanley, the Secretary for Ireland, introduced a Bill to suppress disturbances in that country; he attacked the Irish leader, Daniel O'Connell, in an elaborate and passionate speech, and believed that for once he had surpassed his formidable opponent. To his chagrin, the reports in the newspapers were scrappy and inaccurate. In the *Mirror of Parliament* alone he found an intelligent summary, but even this comprised only the first and concluding portions of the speech. He guessed that the same hand was responsible for both these sections, and asked the Whig Party's agent to send him the writer.

John, imagining the call for "Mr. Dickens" to be for himself, hastened to pay his respects to the Minister.

The mistake was discovered, and John, his personal hopes dashed, fetched his son. After expressing astonishment at Charles' youth, Stanley repeated the whole speech from memory—posturing, gesticulating, pausing, striking the table to emphasize his points, just as he had done in the Commons—while Charles strained all his skill to note it down in shorthand.

"Are you sure you have every word, Mr. Dickens?" Stanley asked at the end, wiping his streaming forehead.

"I think so, sir," said Charles.

"My son is a man of his word," interposed John, "a chip off the paternal block. You may be sure, sir, that his report will be exact, even to the most negligible comma."

"He is a clever boy," said Stanley, "and should go far."

"It may be within your power, sir," suggested Charles, "to recommend me for a secretaryship to some distinguished member of Parliament."

Stanley considered, and gave him a note to one of his supporters.

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Father and son departed gleefully, but the member proved an ill-natured, conceited man, prepared indeed to engage Charles as secretary, but only at a ridiculously small salary. Stanley smiled sympathetically when Charles, bringing him a written draft of the speech, related his experiences.

"A secretaryship," he said, "is no fit post for an ambitious young man. Keep at your own work, and you will find better opportunities. You may always count on my assistance."

Then Maria came home from Paris. Charles learned the tremendous news from Kolle during a rehearsal of the theatricals. Kolle, too, arranged their first meeting, bringing her with Anne to Bentinck Street one evening.

Maria had not changed; she was just as pretty, just as arch and just as bewitching as when she went away. There was no question of rehearsing that evening; the four young people went for a stroll—Kolle and Anne walking a few steps behind the others.

"You have never been so beautiful, Maria," sighed Charles. "Your image has always been in my mind. Ever since you went away, my darling, I have thought of no one but you whom I adore."

"You really mustn't say such things," expostulated Maria. "I don't know what pa would do if he knew we were here together. He thinks I have come out for a walk with Anne and Mr. Kolle, and you know he doesn't approve of you."

"You approve of me. That's all that matters."

"I don't quite know if I do. You're so hasty."

"Hasty? Think how I have waited all these long months for your return."

"You're still a flatterer."

"Maria, my dearest love, you forget that we are both of age now. We can be married without your father's consent."

"I never heard of anything so wicked."

"But we've been engaged for more than a year."

"Look at Daphne chasing that sparrow! Isn't she droll?"

"Never mind Daphne now," said Charles, seizing her hand.

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"You're hurting my hand."

"You're hurting my heart. You promised to marry me."

"I never did any such thing."

"Do you mean to say that you don't intend to marry me?"

"I think you're very unkind, Charles. You really must have patience. I should never have come to see you if I had dreamed that you would be so horrid and rude. You've changed dreadfully."

"Will you marry me?"

"You know that pa and ma won't hear of it."

"I've told you already that, as we are both of age, their consent is unnecessary."

"I will never marry without their consent."

"Very well, then," cried Charles, withdrawing his hand from hers with a dramatic gesture. "Farewell! You have broken my heart. May we never meet again!"

He turned and, with a grim bow to Anne and Kolle, stalked rapidly away.

No one, he was convinced, had ever been treated so treacherously before. No one had ever been so heartlessly jilted. He flung into his home and, rushing up-stairs, threw himself on his bed and sobbed bitterly.

Augustus entered the room and, seeing his distress, put his arms around him. Charles could never resist his little brother; with tears running down his cheeks, he told the uncomprehending child what had happened. It eased him to put his sorrow into words.

From a locked drawer he took out the thin bundle of letters, so few and so fingered, which he had received from Maria. He untied the blue ribbon which bound them, read them once more and, taking the ring from his finger, placed it with them and retied the packet. Addressing this to Kolle for Maria, he left it at the bank with the porter. But he could not resist an impulse to walk round the corner and gaze up at Maria's window.

His mood changed overnight and, when he recalled the argument which had ended so tragically, he concluded that the quarrel had been a foolish misunderstanding. How

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natural, he told himself, that Maria should be startled by his abrupt proposal to elope! Instead of taking offense, he should have pleaded with her, gradually demolishing her doubts and hesitations. Was it too late?

At the next rehearsal Kolle told him that Maria refused to discuss the quarrel, and begged him never to mention Charles' name; but, he added with a smile, when he had mentioned going to Bentinck Street, she had asked him several questions indirectly concerning Charles. From this Kolle concluded that she would not be averse to a reconciliation.

Cheered by these tidings, Charles threw himself into his work as producer and principal actor. The rest of the cast were astonished at his vivacity; he recited his lines and sang his songs with unprecedented verve. Whenever the others were at a loss, he dashed among them and set them right with energetic pantomime.

Fanny, playing the heroine, said to Kolle, "You have brought Charles good news. He was very sad until you came."

"Has he confided in you, Miss Dickens?"

"I can read him like a book."

"And what does the book tell you?"

"That he loves Maria dearly—and knows, deep down, that she does not really love him."

Yet it was Fanny who took the next step to reconcile the lovers, by urging her brother to write to Maria. He would not at first consent, but a dismal week of silence humbled him. Maria did not reply, but Charles received a letter from Kolle in which the latter announced his official engagement to Anne and invited Charles to be best man at the wedding.

Charles fell even deeper into despondency at this fresh contrast with his own unhappiness. He sent a formal note of congratulation, but no sooner posted it than he regretted not having tried to adjust his own troubles. He scribbled another note, peremptorily calling the prospective bridegroom to rehearsal. Kolle's good fortune, he sneered, had made him forget his obligations toward his fellow actors.

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When Kolle arrived at the rehearsal, Charles drew him aside and poured complaints into his ear. Why had Maria not written? Did she not know that he was dying of love for her?

"Ask her to come to the performance on Saturday," he cried. "Heavens above, how cruel she is! Implore her to come—no, I mean, ask her to come—and let her know that, if she fails, my heart will break!"

He turned to shout directions to his sister on the extemporary stage.

"No, no, Fanny, you mustn't seem fond of him. Be coy; be diffident; let him know that you're indifferent to his advances."

Kolle smiled at the incongruity and, because he genuinely liked Charles, promised to urge Maria to attend the performance.

From dawn on the day of the theatricals, confusion overwhelmed the Dickens' house.

John was beside himself. Cast as a farmer in *Clari* and as a retired manufacturer in *Amateurs and Actors*, the farce which was to wind up the entertainment, he had also to manipulate the curtain, trim the lamps, lay out the costumes for the players, prompt the forgetful, and summon those whose turn it was to appear. Private worries too weighed on his mind. He feared that his creditors, again aggressive, would attempt to arrest him during the excitement of the performance, and insisted, therefore, on wearing his costume and burnt-cork mustache all day.

Charles gave his mother charge of the chairs, bidding her reserve half a dozen in the front row against the arrival of the Beadnell party. So thrilled was she by her task that she maintained a continuous flood of reminiscence, and all Fanny's persuasion was needed to prevent her delaying the preparations.

At last every detail was in order. A curtain was drawn across the entrance to the back drawing-room, masking the stage. The actors met, snatched a scanty meal, and hurried off to the bedrooms to dress.

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The audience began to assemble. Uncle Thomas Barrow, John's old colleague at Somerset House, burst into a fury because his sister would not allow him to sit in the middle of the front row.

"Charles has asked me to keep those chairs for a party of his friends," she explained, "though I don't understand why he should prefer them to his own flesh and blood, which is thicker than water, especially in a private house."

Thomas planted himself, under protest, in a chair beside the forbidden places, and grumbled at every one who approached him. The room quickly filled, and Charles, gazing through a slit in the curtain, realized that it was nearly time to begin.

But there was no sign of Maria.

The clock struck seven. The audience grew silent and, when nothing happened, restless. Charles waited minute after minute, waving aside his father, who urged him to begin. Hope drooped; only Kolle's lateness encouraged him to fancy that, after all, Maria might be on her way.

Ten more minutes passed. It was impossible to delay longer. He was loosing his hold of the curtain, before taking his place with the other actors in the prologue, when a commotion at the door stopped him.

There was Kolle, with Anne on his arm. Mrs. Dickens ushered her toward the front row, while Kolle hastened behind the scenes.

Another stifling moment of suspense, and Charles' heart jumped. Maria, adorable Maria, entered the room. She was accompanied by Mary Ann Leigh and a tall elderly woman carrying a large fan.

He felt Fanny's hand on his elbow.

"She's here," he whispered.

Regaining in a moment the instinct of the stage, he took his stand by his colleagues and signed to John to pull open the curtain.

The prologue went with a swing. Fanny missed one of her cues. Charles prompted her out of the corner of his mouth, and the danger passed. At the end of the scene,

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John pulled the curtains together to loud applause from the audience. Only Uncle Thomas' growl seemed to dissent.

The printed program announced that the orchestra would be "numerous and complete." Actually it consisted of Fanny, when she was not engaged on the stage; her admirer, Harry Burnett, and a young relative who surprised everybody, himself not least, by his performance on the oboe. They now played a selection of airs from *Clari*, including "Home, Sweet Home," its chief song, while the principals completed their preparations.

Again the curtain parted, and the evening's entertainment proceeded.

No need to tell here how John forgot to prompt the other players when they most needed his help; how sweetly Fanny sang; how Charles strutted and declaimed like a professional; how his sixteen-year-old sister, Letitia, played two parts—one a girl, the other an old woman—with the utmost aplomb; how her two little brothers, in minor rôles, grinned at their friends in front and had to be pushed off the stage; how Augustus, who had been sent to bed on suspicion of hiccups, appeared at the door in his nightshirt; how Kolle, fixing his eyes on Anne in the front row, spoke and sang to her alone. *Clari* was a triumph, and Charles, peering at the end through the closed curtain, felt that he had at last tasted success.

There sat Maria, applauding with all her strength. Even Miss Leigh's glance was friendly. Only the elderly woman beside her and her neighbor, Uncle Thomas, seemed unmoved. They whispered together and their manner bristled criticisms.

Charles wished Uncle Thomas had not come, and wondered again who the lady was.

His forebodings were justified. As soon as the next act began, the two malcontents started to utter comments. First the lady's remarks could be distinguished; then Uncle Thomas' grumbles. The lady tittered, Uncle Thomas laughed, and the people sitting behind them tried indignantly to hush them. Uncle Thomas expostulated; the lady supported him.

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Soon the audience was divided into two camps, a minority expressing sympathy with the interruptors, the rest denouncing them.

"Who on earth is the woman sitting next to Miss Leigh?" Charles asked Kolle when the sketch ended.

"Her mother," replied Kolle, "a disagreeable person."

During the last portion of the performance she demonstrated how very disagreeable she could be. She encouraged Uncle Thomas to condemn the acting, and he was almost bawling criticism when the curtain closed for the last time. Most of the audience, however, as much from irritation with Uncle Thomas as from appreciation of the players, endeavored to compensate for his behavior by the volume of their applause. Maria was among the most enthusiastic, and Charles, watching her through the hole in the curtain, choked back his rage and felt that the evening had indeed been a success.

"Keep them here till I join you," he commanded Kolle, and rushed away to remove the paint from his face. "Don't let even the old woman go, or the others won't stay."

Kolle did his work well, and, when Charles hurried into the auditorium, he found Maria standing near the door.

"Did you enjoy it, Maria?" he asked anxiously.

"It was lovely," she replied, placing her hand in his. He let it lie there under the amused glance of Mary Ann.

"And you, Miss Leigh?" he inquired.

"I was most beguiled, Mr. Dickens."

"Is this the young gentleman who played the part of the country actor?" her mother asked.

"Yes, ma," replied Mary Ann, as Charles hastily dropped Maria's hand.

"Then, as a candid woman, I must tell him that I thought him excessively vulgar."

"I am sorry you should think that, ma'am," said Charles.

"When I consented to come here, I expected something more elevating, more genteel, more Christian."

"Is it un-Christian, ma'am, to endeavor to amuse, where no improper word is spoken?" Charles retorted.

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Mrs. Leigh tossed her head, and Mrs. Dickens hastily drew her into another room to take a glass of wine.

"You must not mind ma, Mr. Dickens," said Mary Ann, insinuating herself between him and Maria. "She must always find fault. I thought everything admirable."

No matter how hard Charles tried to draw Maria aside, Mary Ann stood in the way.

She praised his acting, and he could not withstand the flattery. She spoke warmly of Fanny's performance and her looks, and he wondered how he could have imagined her malicious. She inquired if he had had much trouble in rehearsing the pieces, and when he would arrange more theatricals.

"I have brought my album with me," she told him, pressing a book into his hand. "I want you to write some of your verses in it."

"With great pleasure," replied the gratified poet.

He saw Maria standing with her sister and Kolle. She had treated him abominably during the past year; she had ignored his letters and left him lonely and miserable. He would teach her that he was not dependent on her for his happiness!

Mary Ann, her closest friend, was clearly losing her heart to him. The smile which once he had thought mischievous, he now saw as merely roguish. Mary Ann had spirit; she appreciated good acting and verses; she offered inspiration to an ambitious man. Whereas Maria, a spoiled beauty, demanded all and gave nothing.

"Oughtn't you to talk to poor Maria?" said his companion at last. "You're neglecting her shamefully."

"I'm under no obligation to her that I know of, my dear Miss Leigh."

"But I thought you were engaged."

"We are so no longer, and I have sent back her ring. Where are you going?"

"I must talk to Maria."

Maria did not speak to Charles when he followed Mary Ann toward her. She forced a smile, and said that it was

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time to leave. The last Charles saw of her was a pale set profile, as Kolle helped her into a coach.

When the excitement evaporated, Charles wondered if he had gone too far. He loved Maria, not Mary Ann. Maria deserved a lesson, no doubt, but had he not been too severe?

He anxiously awaited word from her—if only a remonstrance.

No word came. He could not bear the suspense, and wrote to her through Kolle to beg for a meeting. Next day she replied curtly that his conduct had amazed her. How dared he confide in Mary Ann? Had he no more sense of honor and courtesy than to flirt with her, and even take her album, before Maria's eyes?

Unhappy Charles! He decided that Mary Ann had trapped him. She must have told Maria at once—perhaps even in the coach on the way home—that Charles, to gain her confidence, had betrayed the secret of the broken engagement. He found replying very difficult. If he denied point-blank that he had confided in Mary Ann how was her knowledge of the broken engagement to be explained? Then he remembered Mary Ann's boast that Maria "tells me everything, every single thing." Here was a loophole! Why should he not, as a subtle evasion, assume that Maria had first revealed the unhappy secret to Miss Leigh? In his letter to Maria, therefore, he repelled the accusation of perfidy, insisting that she, and not he, had confided in Mary Ann. The latter, he declared, was to blame for the whole incident. He had not flirted with her; *she* had made advances to him. He could not endure her, for he loved only Maria; in proof of which, he said, he would send Miss Leigh's album back to her and let Maria see a copy of his letter.

Next he wrote to Mary Ann and announced that he was returning her album, as he had no time to write in it. He denied that he was the "babbler" which, he understood, she considered him; and expressed the wish to have nothing more to do with her. He made a copy of the letter for Maria, and proposed to hand it to Kolle at the latter's farewell bachelor party.

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This party began in an atmosphere of nervous sniggers but, as the hock circulated—Kolle alone abstaining—Charles quickly lost his discretion and proclaimed his sorrows. He drank to Kolle's happiness, contrasting it with his own gloomy fate. He drank to "Woman, Lovely But Perfidious." He drank to a "Fair Unknown." After this, he drank for the sake of drinking, and ended the evening tipsy.

To his delight he received a note from Maria, acknowledging the copy of his letter to Mary Ann. But, she added, she must see the girl's reply before holding further communication with him.

He followed up this breach in her reserve by a reminder that Kolle's wedding was only a few days ahead, after which his only safe channel of communication with her would be closed. Would she not meet him somewhere and let him explain everything?

Maria answered that she was much too busy. That was all—and Charles knew it meant the end.

He looked critically in the mirror as he dressed for the wedding. His face was drawn; there were dark rings beneath his eyes—ample proof for Maria how real was his anguish. Or would she imagine that he had sought forgetfulness in dissipation? If she did, this touch of romance might soften her.

He watched Maria and Mary Ann, the bridesmaids, enter the church with Anne and their parents. Maria looked away, while her father and mother coldly acknowledged his bows. After the ceremony, in which Charles contrived to muddle his small part, to the wrath of Mrs. Beadnell, they passed into the vestry.

Stuttering nervously, he claimed the best man's privilege to kiss the bridesmaids. Maria affected not to hear, but Mary Ann offered her cheek. This was too much; he blushed and retired.

He sat at the wedding breakfast in a coma of misery. The Kolles were toasted, and he drank as a condemned prisoner drains a glass at the foot of the scaffold. He emptied a full glass to every toast and, when the newly married

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couple drove away, he found that Maria too had disappeared and he was alone in the street, walking rapidly but unsteadily toward his home.

"How very odd you look," said Fanny, when he arrived.

"Oh, Fanny," he replied, "Maria has succeeded. She has broken my heart, and I shall never, never love any one again."

Was it his imagination, he asked himself incredulously as he stumbled up to bed, that Fanny had smiled?

CHAPTER EIGHT

HE WAS much astonished that, when he was busy, he forgot to be heartbroken. It was useless to tell himself that he had lost Maria irrevocably, that no one could ever replace her, that love could play no further part in his shattered life. So long as he was occupied in the Gallery, in the Courts and in his tiny office in Bell Yard, he found himself more concerned with his ambitions than with his sorrows. He satisfied himself with an ingenious explanation: hitherto his only aim had been to make himself worthy of Maria, but now he meant to show her what a husband she had lost.

This was well enough while Parliament and the Courts were sitting, but, when the vacations brought idleness, he was overcome by bitter memories. He sought consolation in drinking with pot-house acquaintances, but a few experiments proved the remedy worse than the disease. Casting round for a more agreeable anodyne, he picked on Potter, who good-naturedly overlooked another long period of neglect.

"Storm the managers with a play, my noble kinsman," he suggested.

"I did once write a tragedy," Charles replied.

"Exhume it from the bosky grave where it lieth buried; invest its dry bones, Phoenix-like, with the glow of youth! The managers cry aloud for strong scenes, and are not answered. Set a new jewel in the crown of Thespis!"

Charles laughed, rummaged among his possessions, found *Misnar* and went to work on it.

He soon discovered that tragic verse lay beyond his power. Heroic speeches which at bedtime seemed full of poetry, reduced him to angry laughter in the light of morning. He returned *Misnar* to the drawer, and awaited another inspiration.

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This reached him through two books, recently published, which contained humorous accounts of London police-courts. The author was a member of the staff of the *Morning Herald*, whom Charles had often seen at Bow Street.

He attempted a sketch in a similar vein. The result was labored but not wholly unsatisfactory, and, though he tore up draft after draft, the rudiments of a lively style began to appear in his sentences. At last he produced a sketch which pleased him so well that he determined to submit it to an editor. It was founded on an incident, vexatious at the time, but humorous in retrospect.

John, anxious to do honor to his brother-in-law, Thomas Barrow, invited him to dinner at Bentinck Street. Barrow hesitated. He was a bachelor of settled habits, dining each evening at a tavern where a seat was reserved for him by the fireside; the company of his sister's husband was tolerable only for short periods, and the prospect of listening to John for a whole evening alarmed him. The invitation, however, was so vigorously pressed that he was forced to go.

Unfamiliar with Bloomsbury and delayed by misdirections, he arrived to find a dozen of John's friends looking at their watches. At dinner his host proposed toast after toast and, worse still, suddenly called upon him to reply. Barrow was no speaker, and his stammering failure increased his irritation. To crown all, it began to rain on his way home; he could not find a cab and was soaked to the skin.

Charles wrote a story round this disastrous evening, with the title *A Dinner at Poplar Walk*. He dared not sign it and, in search of a pseudonym, he remembered his games with Augustus, wherein the little boy impersonated "Boze." This gave him an idea; he hastily wrote "By Boze" under the title and, as an afterthought, struck out the last letter, so that it read "Boz."

All day he walked the streets with the manuscript in his pocket, afraid to approach the office of the *Monthly Magazine*, for which he designed it. At dusk he slunk into Johnson's Court, a dark alley off Fleet Street, and stealthily dropped the packet in the editor's letter-box.

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As soon as the next issue of the *Monthly* appeared in the bookshops, he bought a copy and feverishly searched for his sketch. It was not there. He comforted himself with the thought that there had scarcely been time for its insertion, but he had not this consolation a month later, when again he found no sign of his work.

The idea of another sketch, based on the lighter side of the *Clari* evening, bubbled in his head, and gave him no peace until he set to work on it. He heightened Uncle Thomas' disagreeableness and made Mrs. Leigh ridiculous by suggesting that she was piqued at her daughter's exclusion from the cast. He called this *Mrs. Joseph Porter*, and locked it away half finished.

One morning he noticed another new *Monthly* lying in a bookstall in the Strand. He tiptoed toward it, seized it with quivering hand, and turned the pages. Suddenly he saw the title *A Dinner at Poplar Walk*. It was printed without his pen-name, but every word was familiar. His whole body trembled. The street, the shop, the shelves, the books and magazines swam round him, and he leaned against the door to steady himself.

"I never knew the *Monthly* have such an effect," exclaimed the bookseller. "Compose yourself, sir! Let me bring you a glass of water, sir!"

"Thank you, thank you, it's nothing—a touch of faintness," Charles murmured. "I'm quite well again, thank you—never so well in my life." Hugging the precious magazine, he hurried off.

"I've seen many yawn over the *Monthly*," the bookseller remarked to his assistant. "But swoon!—Wouldn't the editor be proud!"

Charles read as he walked. Prose so sublime had never before adorned the pages of a magazine. Absorbed in his own sentences, laughing at his own jokes, he collided with one man after another, heedless of their oaths. Draymen and cab-drivers yelled as he stumbled across side-streets under their horses' heads. He turned down Whitehall and into Westminster Hall, where a sleepy judge, in one of the

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Chancery Courts, nodded over a long-winded pleading. Here Charles sat and read his sketch a dozen times, with tears of joy running down his cheeks. Loitering clerks gaped, but he did not observe them. The whole outer world was obliterated from him by the rapture of success.

When the first ecstasy passed, he thought of Maria. She might have shared this triumph, but she had chosen to throw the chance away. That she might not remain ignorant of her folly, he bought another copy of the magazine on his way home, and sent it to her through Kollo, marking his own contribution.

He quickly completed *Mrs. Joseph Porter* and dropped the manuscript, in full daylight this time, into the letter-box of the magazine. The piece appeared in the next issue, and he set to work on a humorous account of a snobbish matron,—who, he told himself, was based on Mrs. Beadnell,—her pursuit of a smart young bachelor for one of her daughters, and her horrified discovery that the quarry was only a draper's assistant.

When this was printed, Charles took the magazines to Blackmore, his former employer, and proudly disclosed his work.

The lawyer chuckled over the stories.

"What do they pay you?" he asked.

"Nothing," Charles confessed.

"And don't print your name either? My dear Dickens, you've struck a poor bargain."

At his advice Charles called on the editor. Captain Holland had not long returned, broken in health, from campaigning with Bolivar for the liberty of South America. It was his present aim to infuse Radical ideas into England, and he complained to Charles that the *Monthly* was not wholly fulfilling his hopes.

"So you see, I really can't afford to pay my contributors, Mr. Dickens," he said. "Funds won't run to it. But I'll print your pen-name, if it gives you pleasure."

"Payment would give me even greater pleasure," replied Charles, holding tight to his manuscripts.

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"Perhaps I might manage half a guinea a page. Suit you? Good! Leave your stories."

Charles returned gleefully to Blackmore.

"It's little," said the lawyer, shaking his head. "I should imagine that you can do much better."

John Barrow, too, Charles' editor, was impressed by his nephew's sketches.

"I didn't think you had it in you," he said. "I wish the *Mirror* published stories: I'd pay well for work like this. You're an original, there's no denying it."

"Can you help me find a post where I can show it, Uncle John? Besides, I should like to be on a newspaper which is published all the year round, and not only when the Parliament is sitting."

"I'll give you a letter to the editor of the *Times*, if you wish."

But there was no vacancy on the *Times*, and Charles again approached his uncle.

"Do you remember, Uncle John, taking me to dine with Mr. Collier of the *Chronicle*——"

"And you amused yourself in Hungerford Market by feeding a little boy on a man's shoulder with cherries, without his father knowing. Yes, I remember. I hoped then that Collier might offer you something. You could try him again.—Stay, here's a better way. The *Chronicle* is in the Whigs' pocket, and Stanley, you say, promised to help you. Go and see Stanley!"

Charles waited on the politician and laid the magazines before him. Stanley, recalling his promise, sent for his Party factotum, who assured them that a place on the *Chronicle* could easily be obtained. He went about the task so promptly that, at the end of the session, Charles left the *Mirror* and joined the *Chronicle* in permanent employment. He abandoned for ever his work in the Courts, gave up the little room in Bell Yard, and took with him as further recommendation the latest *Monthly*, which contained his first sketch to bear the signature "Boz."

At the new office he was surrounded by strenuous purpose-

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ful bustle. Instead of easy-going Barrow and his erratic colleagues, of whom John Dickens was typical, most of the *Chronicle* staff were keen Scots, watchful for the latest news and eager to outstrip all competitors. Their daily strategy was directed by Black, the editor, a spectacled scholar whose whimsical cynicism masked an energetic and ingenious mind. His lieutenant, Mackay, a dour youth always in shirt-sleeves, complained incessantly of the ignorance and slovenliness of all English reporters, the newcomer not least.

Charles was sent chiefly to report speeches at meetings and banquets for which his skill at shorthand admirably fitted him. Black mocked him; Mackay eviscerated his reports, and he began to realize the defects in his equipment. He saw how immature were the stories of which he had been so proud—"Och, ony fule can write for magazines!" snapped Mackay—and every day he learned more of the need for conciseness, direct statement, exactitude and proportion. It was painfully borne in on him that writing, even for newspapers, is not a simple record of observation and emotion, but an exacting and complex craft.

Black's delight was to steal a march on the *Times*. He denounced the rival sheet in his columns with a violence equaled only by the retorts of Sterling, its chief leader-writer. Charles, a vigorous partisan, sought to detect the weak points in Sterling's armor, and had sometimes the audacity to suggest to Black a new angle for his shafts.

Before long he was drawn actively into the battle. Black sent him to Edinburgh to assist Thomas Beard, a senior member of the staff, in reporting a banquet given to Lord Grey on his retirement from the Premiership. There they discovered that the *Times* had sent no fewer than four reporters and, by a special arrangement for post-horses all down the Great North Road, would be able to publish an account twenty-four hours before the *Chronicle*. They returned crestfallen; Black and Mackay were furious, and Charles knew that, innocent of blame though he was, his first important mission had failed miserably.

Since time and speed were so important, he decided that

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he must live closer to the *Chronicle* offices. It was hard to leave Augustus, though he could hardly see him less than at present. He found rooms in Cecil Street, off the Strand, where the landlady, discerning his innocence of house-keeping, gave him watery stew every day for dinner, purloined his provisions, appropriated a nutmeg-grater which he bought for making punch, and wholly neglected his comfort. Fanny's indignation made him move to lodgings in Buckingham Street, a hundred yards away, but they were dark and dirty, and the landlady drank as well as pilfered.

After various other unsatisfactory experiments, he sought refuge in Furnival's Inn, a building erected on the site of a former Inn of Court. There he rented two rooms at the back of the second floor, and met with a housekeeper who did not disregard his tastes entirely. She was pert to Fanny and Mrs. Dickens when they visited him—the latter denounced her as “nothing better than a winged dragoon breathing fire”—and his tea and sugar still vanished, but these were trifles by contrast with his wretchedness in previous lodgings.

Perhaps his sensibilities were being numbed by the snubs reserved for newspaper reporters. At public dinners he was segregated with his fellows at a side-table, given his food cold and broken, and treated by ushers and waiters as an unpleasant necessity. He hung about police-courts, and shivered for hours in the drafty corridors of Government offices. Petty Whig politicians, from whom Mackay desired information, regarded him as a mere shorthand-writing machine. To his first enthusiasm, when all his duties seemed pleasurable and important, there succeeded disillusion and gloomy self-contempt. Soon, however, he learned a means of revenge: it was easy to make a disagreeable speaker ridiculous by slightly changing the temper of his words.

Other circumstances too hardened him. Writing on his knee in the Commons Gallery and standing in the reporter's pen in the House of Lords were wearisome enough, but not so uncomfortable as his work when Parliament rose and he was flung in pursuit of the dispersing orators. He took down

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their speeches in the open air, in market-halls and in inns, transcribing his shorthand notes in swaying post-chaises while the horses galloped dangerously over rutty roads. Or he wrote through the night on rickety bedroom-tables and, when day broke, urged a hired nag across country to hand his report to the guard of a London-bound coach. Whatever the difficulties, whatever the discomfort, the *Chronicle* pardoned no default.

His journeys gave him an extensive, if fragmentary, glimpse of the whole picture of English life. He never knew whither Black and Mackay would next dispatch him. One night he would return from Brighton; the next would find him at Norwich, or Canterbury, or Reading. He was absent from London for weeks on end. For the first time he saw the new industrial cities of the Midlands, the glare of their furnaces against the night sky, and the misery of the workers who crept through their squalid streets.

Unexpected perils menaced him. He was overturned in chaises by day and by night. A post-boy stunned him against the top by pulling up the horses on their haunches, to allow a pack of belling hounds to cross. Once, as he was passing through a peaceful village and thought himself safe from any mischance, a cricket-ball smashed the window and missed his head by an inch. But his luck held and he escaped serious hurt, though the *Chronicle* had to pay for broken chaises and injured horses, and for all the damage to his wardrobe. Even the turmoil of the office seemed peaceful beside these wild drives.

One morning, when Parliament was sitting again, Black called him to his room.

"Weel, Deeckens," he said, peering over his spectacles, "hoo's the braw journalist to-day? I want to deemonstrate my appreciation o' the worrk ye're doin' for us."

Charles thanked him warily.

"Dinna thank me, till ye ken what it is I'm wantin'. We're to inaugurate a new journal, the *Evening Chronicle*. A friend o' mine, Geordie Hogarth, will edit it. He writes our creeticisms of arrt and music; ye've seen his name. Will

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ye drap him a letter and spier if he's no' got a wee bit job for ye?"

Hogarth demanded "something by Boz" to enliven the first issue of the *Evening Chronicle*. Flattered and perceiving a chance to improve his position, Charles asked whether the additional work would not mean an increase in pay.

"Hogarth says ye're no' sateesfied wi' your money," said Black, with an affectation of choler.

"I merely suggested to him, sir," Charles stammered, "that, if I were to write once a week for his paper, my salary might be increased."

"What do we pay ye the noo?"

"Five guineas a week, sir."

"It's ower much for a bairn; I'll reduce it." He laughed at Charles' wry face, and added unexpectedly, "If I raise ye to seven guineas, mebbe ye'll be sateesfied."

"Oh yes, sir."

"Ye'll ruin the paper. Och, verra weel; I'm a busy man, so awa' wi' ye to Geordie!"

Hogarth was robust and middle-aged. His high cheek-bones and twinkling eyes were framed in bushy whiskers, and his tousled hair grew far back on his forehead. He greeted Charles with grave kindness, speaking with a scarcely noticeable Scottish burr. The youth offered him a story, but this was not what Hogarth sought. They at last agreed that his first contribution to the new paper should be a description of hackney-coach stands, written in the newest humorous manner. Charles went home to work on it and brought it next day to Hogarth, whose smile broadened with every paragraph.

"Just what I want," he said, laying the manuscript on his desk. "What do you propose for next week?"

"I thought of gin-palaces."

"Gin-palaces—in our respectable paper?"

Charles invented an excuse for his lapse.

"I meant to show," he said glibly, "how the gin-shop battens on the misery of the poor."

"Ay, that would suit our politics," said Hogarth. "Away with you, and write it!"

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The sketch, skilfully toned down by Hogarth, repeated the success of its predecessor.

Charles began another, in which he described with sardonic humor the discomforts of traveling by an early morning coach—the rising by candle-light, the walk through the empty streets to the starting place, and the vexations and delays before the coach left on its journey.

The day this appeared, Black met him on the stairs.

"Ye're looking weel for a' your meeseries, laddie," he remarked.

"Miseries, sir?"

"The meeseries o' travel," laughed Black. "I shall no' feel happy sendin' reporrters oot o' toon in future. It's too bad o' me."

The next time the young man presented a sketch, Hogarth surprised him with an invitation to dine at his house. Charles was immensely gratified. He recognized in this Hogarth's acceptance of him as a social equal. It would raise him from the ordinary ruck of reporters to a world where he had never before penetrated, except for his disastrous visits to the Beadnells'.

He took care to mention the invitation to Mackay.

"Are ye a ladies' man?" asked the latter, opening his eyes at the news. "Hogarth's wife is weel-favored, and she has verra guid-looking dochters."

"Who was she," Charles inquired, "before she married him?"

"Do ye no' ken that her father was Geordie Thomson, wha collected the Scots airs ye ha'e often heerd me whustle?"

Charles arrived at Hogarth's house, nervous with memories of his last dinner-party with the Beadnells. But his host's cordiality and Mrs. Hogarth's kindness soon put him at his ease. While they were talking to him, two girls entered the room.

"My daughters, Kate and Mary, Mr. Dickens," said Mrs. Hogarth. "This is Mr. Dickens, children, whose writings amuse you so in your father's paper."

Charles turned to greet the girls. They were handsome,

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very handsome, he decided immediately, though perhaps not so good-looking as Maria. He was struck by their dignity and simplicity, qualities which she lacked. They both wore demure stuff gowns, with the only difference that Kate's was rose colored and Mary's pale blue.

Kate made on him an instant impression of gentle seriousness. Her face was round and fresh; she had an excellent figure, slender hands and wrists, and her voice, as she returned his greeting, rang clear and musical. Her chin receded a trifle, and her eyes were a shade close together; but her beauty depended more on the healthy bloom of her twenty years than on individual features.

Mary, three or four years younger, was a softer, gayer version of her sister. Her features were finer, her lips fuller. Her expression changed with every thought, and lacked some of Kate's gravity.

He was soon chatting easily to the girls and their parents. Far from being awed, he was delighted to find himself expanding in the warmth of their admiration.

"My husband tells me that you write your delightful sketches straight out of your head," said Mrs. Hogarth.

"Oh, yes," said Charles.

"Ay, he's a grand worker," agreed Hogarth.

"I don't understand how you are able to describe the life of poor people so convincingly," his wife added.

Charles glanced at her uneasily, but saw that her wonder was sincere.

"We reporters have to keep our eyes open, ma'am, you know," he said.

"I have asked Dickens to take us to a different sphere next week," remarked Hogarth. "He will give us a description of Parliament. Perhaps that will stop him paying compliments to Mary."

"Paying me compliments?" cried the younger girl.

"Why, Mary, of course you remember," said Kate. "Didn't Mr. Dickens write that all the Marys he had ever met were handsome."

"I say so still," cried Charles. "And their sisters too!"

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Kate blushed, and the stolidness of her expression vanished. She was far prettier, he noticed, when she smiled.

They encouraged him to speak of himself, his work, his journeys into the country, and his experiences in the Gallery and the Courts; but he took care always to turn the conversation from his childhood, where lurked those two detestable specters—the blacking factory and the Marshalsea.

Hogarth asked his opinion on the prospects of Lord Melbourne's ministry, which had just succeeded Sir Robert Peel's. Charles broke into a tirade against politics and politicians.

"What does it matter whether Whigs or Tories are in?" he cried. "One gang is as rotten as the other! They argue and quarrel and chatter—but it's all unreal and heartless. They pass acts to abolish slavery abroad; do they abolish slavery at home? Do they think of the child drudge in the factory? Do they ever spare a thought for the poor wretches rotting their lives away in debtors' prisons? Whig or Tory, Parliament's just cant, hypocrisy and humbug!"

He stopped, and asked their pardon for his violence.

"Never apologize for sincerity, Dickens," said Hogarth. "It's too rare in these days. But I think perhaps you judge a little hastily; all politicians are not so black as you paint them."

"There's young Gladstone, for one," agreed Charles, "who sits for Newark. He may be an out-and-out Tory, but he's genuine, he's generous, he feels as well as speaks. I've heard him champion the poor, urge that fair wages are essential for prosperity, plead for allotments for poor cottagers. Compare him with such creatures as Melbourne and——"

As he spoke, the door opened and a child's face peeped in.

"May I come in, mother?"

"You're half in already, Georgy," laughed Hogarth. "Come and shake hands with Mr. Dickens."

Georgina Hogarth was only seven years old, but the family resemblance had already developed. She was very like Mary, with the same lively expression on her rounded features.

Charles smiled at her. She ran to him, divining with a

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quick instinct the qualities which made him the favorite playmate of his own brothers and sisters, and climbed on his knee.

"Why, Georgy!" cried her mother.

"Let her bide," said Hogarth. And she stayed there until she fell asleep, her head on Charles' arm.

Never had he spent so enjoyable an evening. He had grown up in a family distracted with anxiety and cares, where every caller was suspect, where existence was a hand to mouth struggle. But here, at the Hogarths', everything spelled security, peace and fireside comfort. They knew nothing of such trials as John's recurrent insolvencies, and Mrs. Dickens' tearful battle against want. His sister Fanny seemed insipid, and Maria Beadnell vulgar, beside the grace and intelligence of Kate and Mary. He walked home enchanted. He had found a new ideal.

He reviewed the evening's events, wondering if he had made a good impression. Had the past ever peeped out? Had he been too informal? Had he talked too much? He remembered their obvious pleasure when little Georgina climbed on his knee; her instant liking for him had certainly raised him in their estimation.

Eager to resolve his doubts and, if possible, to obtain another invitation, he dispatched a letter of thanks to Mrs. Hogarth and, next day at the office, overwhelmed her husband with gratitude for his entertainment.

"We were all charmed with you," answered Hogarth simply. "You must think of us when you write."

Charles thought of little else, and spent hours in polishing his next sketch to please Mrs. Hogarth and her daughters.

"My lassies are asking when you will dine with us again," said Hogarth a fortnight later.

"I should love to come," cried Charles.

"Then what's to prevent your coming this evening? You'll not be expected; do you mind taking pot-luck?"

Charles accepted with delight, and they surprised Kate and Mary in the drawing-room.

"Oh, father, we're not dressed to receive visitors," said the elder girl, with a glance at her plain frock.

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"I hope my arrival is not inconvenient, Miss Hogarth," said Charles.

"You're not a visitor this evening, Dickens," Hogarth reassured him. "You're just one of ourselves. Where's your mother, Mary?"

"She's gone to bed with a headache."

"I'll go up to her. You lassies must try to amuse Dickens, and make him forget that he's famishing."

Charles envied their composure.

"Come and sit on the sofa, Mr. Dickens," Kate said. "I want you to tell us more about your adventures, while we're waiting for father."

As he perched himself awkwardly by her side, he picked up the newspaper which she had dropped at their entrance. It was an *Evening Chronicle*, open at his latest sketch. He glanced at her, and their eyes met.

"Do you find your work very difficult, Mr. Dickens?" she asking, blushing.

"Yes—no—not very difficult," stammered Charles. "It's tiring at times, but full of excitement."

He was still talking when Hogarth returned.

"I asked you to entertain Dickens," he chuckled to his daughters. "It looks to me as if he is entertaining you."

Father and daughters seemed to regard him as an old friend. After dinner he volunteered to help them correct the proofs of his host's book on musical history. The three young people grew so absorbed in their task that Hogarth slipped away to smoke a cigar, without their noticing his departure.

"I suppose you know it's midnight, Kate," he said, reappearing. "Our guest has to work in the morning."

"I declare, I never knew time pass so quickly," cried Kate.

"We've nearly finished the first chapters," Charles added hastily. "May I—may I come and help you again when the next proofs arrive?"

"That would be kind of you, Mr. Dickens," said Kate.

His friendship with them was interrupted in May, when

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he and Beard were sent to follow Lord John Russell's reelection campaign in the West. Charles had never loathed "Little Lord Johnny's" heavy head and droning voice so much as when it took him away from his delightful proof-reading with the sisters. The weather, moreover, was execrable and the roads often impassable. The *Times* sent its usual battalion of reporters, but Charles and Beard were determined not to be beaten. After the first speech, the two *Chronicle* men sat up all night to complete their report for dispatch to London by the morning coach.

Then Charles went on to Bath. He knew of this city as the most fashionable spa in England, and the epitome of luxury and taste; but he was unprepared for its sycophantic adulation of rank and wealth. A newspaper reporter, he discovered, ranked with beggars and actors in its eyes; the very footmen scorned him.

At first he wondered why he could not laugh at these slights, as he had long since learned to do; then he recognized that his annoyance was bound up with his constant thoughts of the Hogarth girls.

If flunkeys despised him, how could they respect him?

But he had his reward: the *Times* was beaten, and he and Beard returned to London, blear-eyed with lack of sleep, to be warmly congratulated by Black.

"Ye've done brawly, laddies," said the editor. "I'd tell ye a muckle mair, but ye'd be demandin' mair money. Awa' to bed; ye'll hae plenty worrk the morn."

Throughout the summer Mackay dispatched Charles—"in conseederation o' your sairvices"—on expeditions to the country. This traveling was particularly untimely, for it interfered not only with his proof-reading with the sisters, but also with a set of sketches which he had contracted to write for *Bell's Life*, another London newspaper. These were not to be signed by "Boz," but by "Tibbs," lest Black should take objection to Charles' contributing to a rival journal.

He had also been approached by Thomas Tegg, a publisher, who, discovering him to be the author of the *Chronicle*

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sketches, proposed a book of similar pieces with the title *Sergeant Bell and his Raree-Show*. Charles was to receive one hundred and twenty pounds for this book.

Here was wealth at last!

Despite these occupations, he regularly visited the Hogarths. The proofs of his host's book were now with the printers, but Charles no longer needed this excuse for his calls. He was intimate with all the household. Little Georgina made him her favorite; he revived for her all the games which he had invented for Augustus, and improvised others. Kate and Mary treated him as one of the family and, before ever he analyzed his feelings, their parents had begun to regard him as the elder girl's admirer.

Availing himself one evening of his standing invitation to dine, he found a tall, massively handsome young man, a few years his senior, with Mrs. Hogarth.

"This is Mr. Harrison Ainsworth," she said. "My girls have wanted me to bring you together for some time."

"Delighted to meet you, Mr.—Boz," said Ainsworth. "I've looked forward to making your acquaintance."

Charles bowed. Ainsworth's novel, *Rookwood*, with its thrilling story of Dick Turpin's ride to York, had taken the country by storm twelve months before. It was a prodigious compliment that its author should know his pen-name and his work. He plucked up courage to congratulate Ainsworth on his book and to mention one or two incidents which, he declared, he would have treated differently. From this they drifted into a literary argument, which lasted the whole evening and, as Charles was delighted to observe, increased Ainsworth's interest in him. Before they parted, the older man discovered that Charles lived in Furnival's Inn.

"Macrone must be your neighbor," he said. "He's an enterprising fellow—just the publisher you need. I must introduce you to him."

"I should be immensely obliged," said Charles.

A few evenings later, therefore, Ainsworth took him to Macrone's comfortable apartment. The publisher was a tall, dessicated man with sharp eyes and a staccato voice.

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"My friend Dickens is 'Boz' of the *Chronicle*," said Ainsworth, "and you're always on the scent of new blood."

"I know him," said Macrone. "Any notion for a book, Mr. Dickens?"

"I don't think I ought to undertake any more work at present," replied Charles. "All my time is occupied."

"No use waiting," answered the publisher. "Your style's fresh now; strikes readers as original. In six months you'll be imitated—as you've imitated others. Must put out something at once, to make money."

"Why don't you reprint his *Chronicle* sketches?" Ainsworth suggested.

"*Sketches by Boz*, eh? Select 'em, Mr. Dickens, and I'll publish at once. Two volumes. If they sell, another volume."

He at once drew up a contract, by which the author was to receive a hundred pounds for the copyright of the sketches on the day of publication, and a share in the profits. Charles signed, and Ainsworth witnessed his signature.

"Written any novels, Mr. Dickens?" Macrone asked, locking the agreement in his desk. "Historical—to cut out *Rookwood*? Healthy competition, Mr. Ainsworth."

Charles had never thought of a novel, but he feared to lose this favorable moment.

"I had an idea of a story based on—on the Gordon Riots," he said, inventing rapidly. "The hero was to be a typical London citizen, who is caught in the mob and—and—I'll write out a synopsis and bring it to you."

He could not sleep that night for excitement. A hundred pounds and a share in the profits—for work already published and paid for!

How jealous the other reporters at the *Chronicle* would be, when they knew! In every way he was raising himself above them. First Hogarth had taken him up as a social equal; now Harrison Ainsworth treated him as a fellow author, and Macrone, besides this astounding offer for his sketches, implored him for a novel.

He began to select the material for the volume of

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sketches, and to develop the idea of the novel which he had suggested to the publisher. What with this work, his series for the *Evening Chronicle* and for *Bell's Life*, his reporting in the Gallery, his missions to the country, and, especially, his visits to the Hogarths', he made no attempt to begin *Sergeant Bell and His Raree-Show*.

Tegg, the publisher, complained of the delays, but Charles ignored him.

Why should he find time to write a whole new book for a hundred and twenty pounds, when Macrone was giving him as much for the mere right to reprint his sketches?

He found a further excuse for breaking his engagement to Tegg in a sharp recurrence of his old pains.

He persuaded himself that this illness was brought on by overwork and the hardships of his lonely unsettled life. As he lay in bed, with hot bottles pressed to his throbbing side, he surveyed his lodgings. They were bare, dusty, cheerless; as neglected as they were uncomfortable. Above all, they were lonely. There was no one to tend him in his illness except the indifferent housekeeper. He closed his eyes, and contrasted his solitary misery with the welcome which Hogarth received every evening from his family.

Why should Hogarth be so fortunate, and he so wretched? He too needed some one to care for him—to love and inspire him. If only Maria, dear Maria, were there—or Kate. Kate? Now he understood what drew him to her home evening after evening, why he sought her company and her sympathy.

She could supply all that he lacked. She could transform his life. By marrying her, he would achieve a home, a social background, a solid basis of domesticity on which to build his fortune. He loved her—he was sure that he loved her. She did not move him as intensely as Maria; but how much more admirably suited she was to be his wife!

He threw off the bedclothes and, forgetting all his pain, dressed and hastened to the office.

"Why, my boy, I heard you were ill in bed," exclaimed Hogarth, when Charles entered the room.

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"Yes, but I've come to ask you a question, a most important question."

"Ask away!"

"The fact is—I want to know whether you—I mean, whether you and Mrs. Hogarth—if you would object if I were to ask Kate to marry me?"

He watched Hogarth's expression anxiously, bracing himself to meet a snub.

"I'm not altogether surprised, my dear Dickens," answered the other, with a smile which dispelled his fears. "We've thought sometimes at home that you were beginning to look on Kate as more than a friend. I think I know you well enough—and Mrs. Hogarth agrees with me—to be sure that you would do your best to make Kate a good husband. If she is of our opinion, and you are prepared to wait until you can provide a comfortable home for her, I don't think you will find us standing in your way."

"Is she—have you any idea how Kate is likely to—to receive a manly declaration of my feelings?"

"That's for you to find out," chuckled Hogarth. "But I shouldn't be too frightened, if I were you. At the worst, she can only refuse you."

"Thank you, sir," said Charles.

"My wife and I will not be there this evening, by the way," added the editor, "in case you should feel like calling on the lassies."

Whatever nervousness Charles had felt before in his life—and there had been sufficient occasions in his troubled youth—it was nothing to his alarm this evening when, after dinner with the two sisters, Mary left him alone with Kate. He stood restlessly on the hearthrug, beginning sentences which tailed off in meaningless parentheses. In her wide-flowing gown of rustling silk, Kate seemed to him not merely handsome, but even beautiful. Yet he dared not gaze at her.

"Are you quite well?" she asked him at last. "You hardly seem yourself this evening."

He laughed desperately.

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"No, I'm not, and only you can make me better."

"Whatever do you mean?"

He clenched his fists, and turned toward her, forcing himself to speak.

"Just this, dearest Kate. Will you marry me?—There! I've managed to say it. I can't live any longer without you. You don't know how miserable, how lonely my life is. Kate, dear Kate, do say you'll marry me!"

She was silent, but he took her hand and drew her toward him. She did not repel him.

"Come, Kate; I've asked you a question. I am waiting for your answer. Will you marry me?"

"Yes, Charles, I will," she said slowly.

He seized her in his arms and kissed her. He had never kissed any girl before, except his sisters. Then he rested his head on her shoulder. She soothed him, and he felt her soft fingers stroke his hair.

"I have already spoken to your father, my dearest," he said afterward. "I know that your parents will consent to our marriage as soon as I am able to support you. I'm working hard, dear, so hard,—I've got offers from two or three publishers, and half a dozen editors,—but I'll work even harder now that I know that every penny I earn brings our home nearer."

As he anticipated, Mr. and Mrs. Hogarth consented to their engagement. He bought Kate a ring next morning, scarcely remembering the two cheap little rings for Maria and himself on which he had expended his first savings. It fitted Kate's finger perfectly and, when she had paid for it with a kiss, they went off together to inform his parents.

Mr. and Mrs. Dickens received the news according to their natures. John paid Kate compliments so flowery that his periods escaped completely from his control. Mrs. Dickens shed tears, embraced Kate and could not restrain a murmur at Charles' selfishness in taking such a step without consulting her.

"I do think you should be more considerate of my feelings," she said to him privately, while her husband was

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enlarging to Kate upon his son's amazing talents, "now that my cousin John is my cousin Sir John."

Her cousin's baronetcy, the recent reward of nearly fifty years' Government service in China, South Africa and Somerset House, had given a new slant to Mrs. Dickens' conversation. It served both as an additional reproach to her husband in her moments of exasperation, and as a convenient peg for reminiscences.

"I hope Kate's parents are not like those dreadful Bride-wells," she added. "Is her father a banker too?"

"He is a writer on music, mother, of a very distinguished Scottish family."

"My dear Charles, don't tell me that he smokes a bagpipe and wears kilts, which Sir John always says are a comfort to no man."

"No, he doesn't, mother, and, if he did, it wouldn't matter. Do you like Kate?"

"I think she's a sweet girl," said Mrs. Dickens, and thus for a time regained her son's esteem.

Every opportunity of advancement was precious now, if he was to make Kate his wife. He was thrilled, therefore, to receive a letter from the new publishing firm of Chapman and Hall, inquiring if he could undertake a task for them.

This was followed by the visit of a timid little man in black, whose appearance reminded Charles irresistibly of the wooden Noah in his small brother's Noah's Ark.

"My name's Hall, Mr. Boz," he twittered, bowing jerkily, "of Chapman and Hall, Strand, publishers."

"Sit down, my dear Mr. Hall," said Charles. "Come now, where have I seen you before?—Why, how could I ever forget? You sold me a copy of the *Monthly Magazine* two years ago!"

"Bless me, Mr. Boz, are you the young gentleman who fainted in my shop?"

"Perhaps you wondered why. I was seeing myself in print for the first time.—Fancy it being you! What an extraordinary coincidence! However, that's neither here nor there. What can I do for you, Mr. Hall?"

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"You know Seymour, the artist?"

"I know his work."

"Splendid, Mr. Boz. Seymour wishes us to publish a series of plates on the adventures of some Cockney sportsmen—the Nimrod Club, he calls them."

"The idea is not new," said Charles.

"So much the better, Mr. Boz. Chapman and Hall want a humorous text for these sporting plates, month by month. What do you say?"

"What do you pay, Mr. Hall?"

"We had thought of twelve or fourteen pounds a number. I think we could go to fourteen pounds a month for you, Mr. Boz, and a share in the profits above a certain figure. Pray think it over, and come and tell us your decision."

Charles saw no reason to hesitate. An additional income of fourteen pounds a month was just what he needed to make his marriage possible. With a view to avoiding difficulties, since he knew nothing of sport, he suggested to Hall, when he went to the publishers' office with his acceptance, that the plan of campaign should be reversed and Seymour's plates should illustrate his text. Hall promised to do his best to urge this on the artist.

"In any case Chapman and Hall can rely on you to write the story, Mr. Boz," he said, and agreed to advance him thirty pounds.

Charles did not grudge the expense of a cab to hasten to Hogarth's house with the good news. Hand in hand, Kate and he approached her parents, and gained their consent to the marriage as soon as the first issue of the new work was published.

He concentrated all his fantasy upon it, accepting the original idea as a structure capable of indefinite expansion. The name, "Nimrod Club," however, displeased him: it was too reminiscent of other sketches on similar lines; and prevented him from clearly visualizing the characters. He puzzled his brains for a better title, and a lucky chance gave him what he sought.

"I've got it," he cried, leaping into Hall's office.

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"Got what, Mr. Boz?"

"The name of the club! What d'you think of the 'Pickwick Club'?"

"Very good indeed, Mr. Boz. Where did you find it?"

"I saw a Nimrod coach in the Strand; and by a coincidence, immediately behind it was one of Pickwick's Bath coaches, with his name painted on the door."

The title stimulated his imagination, and the skeleton of the chief characters evolved. Pickwick, the central figure, must perforce be, like Surtees' Jorrocks, a comic city merchant. To distinguish him from his forerunner, however, he was to be retired from business and a philosophic observer of mankind. Charles pictured him first as a tall cadaverous man, an aged Potter, but, at his publishers' suggestion, he made him plump and cherubic.

"A comic hero must be fat, Mr. Boz," Hall explained, "if the public is to take to him."

Because Pickwick ought not to be made too ludicrous, another character was needed to suffer the mischances which Seymour wished to illustrate. Charles produced Mr. Winkle, who had already appeared under another name in one of his stories. The love-interest, also essential in Hall's view, called into being Mr. Tracey Tupman, named after a fellow clerk of his father in the Pay Office. Charles had lately taken to writing verses, among them a gloomy ballad on decay, called *The Ivy Green*, which Black thought "verra melodious, but no' suitable for our auld soobscribers." Mr. Snodgrass was created to be an excuse for its appearance. Last, Charles sought a foil for his heroes, a worldly-wise but humorous villain who would help them to make themselves foolish. He toyed with several figures, fixed at last on a seedy strolling-player, christened him Alfred Jingle, and put into his mouth the jerky diction of his aunt's husband, Doctor Lamert, the army surgeon.

As he surveyed this group, he recognized their derivation from the stories and farces in which from childhood he had found so much pleasure; but he consoled himself with Hall's assurance that the public appreciated nothing so much as stock characters in a new guise.

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The skeleton was now complete, and he was ready to start his puppets on their adventures. To avoid topographical difficulties, he dispatched them, after a perfunctory introduction, to Rochester, the countryside which he knew best. For Mr. Winkle's first disaster he used the idea of a duel, already employed for the same character in one of his sketches and also in a farce, *The Strange Gentleman*, which he had planned to write.

Early in the new year the first number of *Pickwick* was written, rewritten, polished, recited to Kate and Mary—who laughed in all the right places—and delivered to Hall.

"We shall bind four hundred copies for the booksellers at first, Mr. Boz," said the publisher.

"Only four hundred?" cried Charles in dismay. "Don't you mean four thousand?"

"Ah, you will have your little joke, Mr. Boz," replied Hall, adding that the first number would be published on the last day of March.

The wedding, thereupon, was fixed for the beginning of April—"Never be wed on the firrst o' April, Deeckens," Black warned him; "it's verra unseemly"—and Charles spent the intervening weeks in a whirl of activity.

He passed the final proofs of Macrone's two volumes of *Sketches* and the first instalment of *Pickwick*. He planned the second number of the latter, introducing such memories of his childhood as Master Budden, the innkeeper's fat and somnolent son, whom John had so often pointed out on their walks, and, with the name of Dingley Dell, the farm to which Mr. Tribe used to take him. He further economized invention by incorporating a story of a dying clown which he had written for the stillborn *Sergeant Bell*. He moved to a larger and more expensive set of rooms in Furnival's Inn, which he and Kate proposed to occupy, with Mary as their companion. He bought furniture, pictures and clothes. He wrote his secret contributions to *Bell's Life*, but persuaded Black and Hogarth to let him off the *Evening Chronicle* series. And, all the time, he was busy reporting.

Yet the days seemed to pass very slowly.

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True, the appearance of *Sketches by Boz*, in two fine volumes, helped to speed them. Kate declared that she read the books straight through as soon as she received them from him, and found their contents better than ever.

Even more welcome to him than her praise was Macrone's check for a hundred pounds.

At last the miracle happened. A package arrived from Hall, enclosing half a dozen slim copies of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club: Number One*. The words "Edited by Boz," were printed in large letters on the green paper cover, but Seymour was not named. Wild with delight, Charles dashed to the nearest bookseller in Holborn and found a pile of the issue in the window.

He hastened on to Doctors' Commons, every stone of which was familiar to him, bought a marriage license with the most unconcerned air he could assume, and presented it to Kate in a copy of *Pickwick*.

Two days later they were married. Hall, more like Noah than ever, attended the wedding. Charles asked him in a whisper how *Pickwick* was selling.

"Do you really want to know, Mr. Boz?"

"Of course I do," said Charles.

"Then I'm sorry to tell you that we haven't sold a hundred copies."

CHAPTER NINE

"ENTER Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dickens!" cried Charles in breezy imitation of a stage direction, as he flung open the door of the Furnival's Inn rooms. Kate and he were returning from their fortnight's honeymoon in a wooden-walled cottage at Chalk, in Kent, radiant and hollow-eyed.

What a honeymoon it had been! In the mornings they had worked on *Pickwick*, he writing, she handing him paper and cutting quills, and insisting that this made her his collaborator. They strolled in the meadows, high over the Thames, which glittered like a sword in the spring sunshine. They watched the London coach swing past and Charles, waving his hand to the driver, told his wife of a lonely little boy who, a dozen years before, had ridden to the city in it with his meager luggage and his luxuriant ambitions. They ran races along the road toward Rochester, and Charles showed her the house on Gad's Hill, which, he vowed, should some day be theirs. To seal this promise he seized her unashamedly at the gate and kissed her, afterward coaxing her to drink a cordial at the "Sir John Falstaff Inn" opposite.

Except for this one public kiss, they endeavored to maintain the appearance of staid married people, so used to each other, so bored with each other, so experienced in combined holiday-making; there were moments when the landlady herself declared that no one would ever have guessed their secret.

The delirious fortnight was ended, but they promised themselves that the honeymoon was only just beginning. As they entered, Mary jumped from her chair and caught her sister in her arms.

"It isn't the same place, Mary. It can't be!" cried Charles. "You've summoned the slaves of the vot-you-may-

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call-it and turned it into a veritable palace. Bless us, there's curtains and rugs and pictures and flowers. The kettle's a-bilin' on the hob. There's even a kitten. Oh Mary, von't you kiss the bridegroom too?"

Everything seemed wonderful to him; everything spelled home and happiness, and the end of his restless and lonely youth. Kate was wonderful. Mary was wonderful. Kate assumed the airs of maturity, insisting on the direction of everything, but it was seventeen-year-old Mary who, pretending to be her sister's bondwoman, mothered the young couple. Mary was sent to order food; Mary confronted the housekeeper; Mary matched ribbons; Mary dusted Charles' desk; Mary suggested excursions and visits to the theater.

Kate tried to cook, and Charles to eat what she set before him; but it was Mary who provided the bread and cheese and bottled stout off which he dined, dissolving his wife's indignation with shouts of laughter. Kate ruffled her hair and inked her fingers over the household accounts, but Mary eventually added up the untidy figures and presented an amended budget to the anxious couple. It was Mary too whom Charles and Kate, bounding breathlessly up-stairs from a ramble over the heath at Hampstead, found entertaining a gaunt gloomy stranger, whose fingers trembled a tattoo on the arm of his chair.

"Charles, this is Mr. Seymour, your illustrator," she announced.

The sisters left the two men together. Charles, astonished at the incongruity of Seymour's manner with his reputation as a humorous draftsman, was still more shocked when he saw the proposed illustration for the dying clown in the next *Pickwick*.

"I think it's too melancholy," he said.

"The shadow of death is melancholy," muttered Seymour, evading his eye.

"Yes, but the man's face is a nightmare as you've drawn it."

"Just as you like; I don't care," said Seymour sullenly. "You've taken charge."

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"Let me see it again in a couple of days, when you've redrawn it."

The artist replaced the etching, and shambled to the door. Charles was relieved to be rid of him.

"Ain't he a valuable asset to a humorous book?" he said to the girls, when they peeped in.

"He said such odd things while he was waiting," Mary remarked. "He talked like a clergyman, and asked me if I was afraid of death."

"What a horrid man!" said Kate.

"Let's forget about him," said her husband. "Now, children, Mr. Boz must work. Having enjoyed his last day's 'oliday from reporting and dissipipated of his energies on 'Ampstead 'Eath, he now craves permission of the haudience to hadd a chapter to his masterpiece. Draw the curtains, Kate, my love. Mary, the kitten's tangling your wool.—Ugh! I can't get Seymour's graveyard face out of my mind. Sit close beside me, both of you, or I shall have the horrors."

He woke in the night with Seymour's face still before him, and drew Kate close to him for comfort. At the *Chronicle* office next day, he was haunted by the same vision. That night was even worse; his shriek, as he came out of a dream, brought Mary to the door of their room. A blight seemed to hang over the place since the artist's visit.

They were startled in the morning by a rap at the door.

"Enter the melancholy Seymour," whispered Charles. But, when Mary opened the door, little Hall, the publisher, entered.

"Bad news, Mr. Boz, dreadful news!"

"*Pickwick*?" cried Charles.

"How did you guess? Yes, Seymour's shot himself."

"We were expecting him this evening," gasped Mary.

"What will happen to *Pickwick*?" Charles asked.

"We can discuss that another time, Mr. Boz. I felt I must bring you the news at once."

"It's a dreadful shock," said Kate hastily. "Poor, poor man—was he married?"

"He leaves a widow and nine children, ma'am."

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"Mr. Hall," Charles broke in again, "this won't mean the end of *Pickwick*, will it? You can easily find another artist?"

"I suppose so, Mr. Boz, but, really, we haven't had time to think yet. It's all been so sudden and so tragic."

"*Pickwick's* doomed," said Charles, when the publisher had gone.

"My dear, do give Mr. Hall time to turn round. He's too upset at present," his wife murmured.

"It will all come right," Mary said. "They'll soon find you a new artist."

"Will they indeed?—Mary, I haven't dared tell you the truth. *Pickwick's* not selling. Seymour's damnable folly will finish it."

The second number appeared, with the two illustrations which the artist had drawn before his death. It sold no better than the first, and Charles told his wife that he must find another means of adding to his income.

He called, therefore, on his neighbor Macrone, obtained from him a promise to reprint another volume of sketches for a hundred and fifty pounds, and definitely agreed to write the novel on the Gordon Riots, with the title *Gabriel Vardon*. The manuscript was to be delivered before the end of the year, when Charles would receive two hundred pounds; if more than a thousand copies were sold, he was entitled to a half-share in the further profits.

"My darling," objected Kate, when he told her gleefully of the agreement, "you'll kill yourself with all this work."

"Hard work breaks no bones, as my venerable ma says," he laughed, and sat down to complete a couple of sketches which he proposed to publish in the *Chronicle* before handing them to Macrone. He felt certain that he had done wisely to obtain new commissions, when he saw the etchings prepared for the third *Pickwick* by an artist named Buss, hastily engaged by Hall as a stop-gap. The publisher too perceived Buss' unsuitability and advertised for a successor.

"Between you and me, Mr. Boz," said the little man, "it's throwing good money after bad. But my partner's determined to try one more issue. I'll send any likely artist to you for your approval before we engage him."

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With this scrap of comfort Charles returned home to learn that Kate had imparted a tremendous secret to her sister. He managed at last to extract it from them. By the new year, he would be a father. Divided between joy at this news and fear of *Pickwick's* future, he set himself to work at double pressure.

The first artist sent by Hall arrived in the middle of a morning, when Charles, whose reporting had kept him busy till past midnight, was still in bed. He was a large, stoutish, untidily dressed, smiling young man with a broken nose and an eyeglass.

"Mr. Dickens is not up yet," said Mary, opening the door.

"*Sapristi*, these authors take life easily," said the visitor. "We know that Homer sometimes nodded—but not, surely, at eleven o'clock in the morning."

"Homer was not a journalist," smiled Mary.

"Don't be too certain of that, *mademoiselle*. Homer wrote of everything in heaven and on earth; he was poor, blind and hungry, and he had no moral sense. Nothing seems more likely than that he was a journalist.—But have I your permission to wait for Mr. Dickens?"

"Most certainly," she said. "Who shall I say wishes to see him?"

"My surname—Thackeray. *Petits noms*—William Makepeace. Occupation—artist. Demeanor—most respectful. Reason for this—desire to illustrate *Pickwick*."

When Mary returned, he rose from the chair in which he was lounging, dropped into it again at her gesture and hummed a verse of a French ballad, exchanging a good-natured smile with her.

Charles entered in his dressing-gown, frowned at the visitor's casual manner and came at once to business. Thackeray explained that he had just returned from Paris, and exhibited drawings which, he claimed, reflected the latest notions of the art schools there. Charles, who judged solely by the style of Seymour and Cruikshank, decided that they were neither grotesque nor anecdotal enough.

The stout youth showed no sign of disappointment. He even seemed to be amused by Charles' criticisms.

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"What a pity you don't like his work, Charles," Mary said, after he left. "He seems such a pleasant person."

"Pleasant, my dear?" replied Charles, combing his hair before the mirror over the fireplace. "I thought him offhand and cynical, too pleased with himself by half. He didn't seem to grasp what I require from an illustrator. And what a cravat!"

The next aspirant was very different. He tapped so softly at the door that it was only at the third knock that Kate heard him. She discovered a burly, beetle-browed young man on the mat, whose fierce glance and uncouth gestures terrified her till she understood that he was stiff with shyness.

The contrast between his appearance and his nature, made the thought flash through her mind that he had looked in a mirror when very young and frightened himself.

She could not at first persuade him to enter. When he did, he edged into a corner, knocking a cup off a shelf, and glared at her husband.

"I'm Hablôt Browne," he murmured, and Charles knew that he was an artist whom Hall had praised to him.

Kate took charge of the visitor, coaxed away the worst of his nervousness, and induced him to let her show Charles his drawings. She had more difficulty, however, in bringing him out of the corner, but, after some time, he sat on the edge of a chair and, breathing hard, listened while Charles expounded his needs and his views on art.

When Charles ceased, Browne looked up at his host with frightened eyes. The others saw his lips and throat working.

"I live across the court," he blurted out, and, snatching up his drawings, rushed from the room.

"He'll do," laughed Charles. "I like his samples, and he'll take orders without sneering—unlike that young feller who came here t'other day from Paris."

He told Hall that he would like Browne to illustrate the further instalments of *Pickwick*.

The third part, with Buss' plates, sold as badly as the others, and Charles expected Hall to terminate the agreement.

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A letter came in the familiar handwriting and, fearing the worst, he opened it behind the pages of his newspaper, lest Kate and Mary should observe his distress. He sighed with relief at finding nothing worse than a request to call at the publishers' office.

"My partner has a suggestion to make, Mr. Boz," said Hall, and led him to Chapman, a large jovial man with the air of a county squire.

"Hall's frightened out of his wits," he laughed, straddling the hearthrug. "He thinks *Pickwick* will bankrupt us."

"I hope not, sir," replied Charles, apprehensively, like a boy cringing before his schoolmaster. In vain he reminded himself that he was a husband, almost a father, the head of a household, and a journalist of experience.

"I want to give you a last chance, Dickens. I like *Pickwick*—bits of it. But you haven't found your form yet, my lad. Something's lacking."

"Yes, sir?" said Charles, breathing more easily at the reprieve.

"I'll tell you what's wrong," Chapman went on. "It needs a good, rousing, low-comedy sort of character—a sympathetic feller, not a villain like Jingle—some one whose fun's as plain as a pikestaff, fun that Tom, Dick and Harry will appreciate. Have you any suggestion?"

"Not at the moment, sir, but I understand what you want."

"Think it over, my friend. Bring your new character round here and introduce him to us. Remember now; broad, simple, old-fashioned fun—that's what we need to save *Pickwick*."

As Charles left the room, Chapman called him back.

"By the way," he laughed, "that cricket-match of yours in the last number! It won't do, my boy. If you'd only told me you didn't understand the game, I'd have taken you to Lords and given you some pointers. Next time your characters go in for sport, come to me for details. Damme, I'll give you the best shooting in Chelsea!"

The young man worried day and night about the character whom Chapman demanded. He attempted combinations of

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stock types drawn from the stage and popular fiction. In the House of Commons he scanned the members for a suitable figure; in the streets he observed every passer-by. He ran through the characters whom he had pictured in the *Sketches*, but none fitted. He considered the boys in the blacking factory, and his uncle's Napoleonic barber in Soho. Casting his mind still further back, he thought of Chatham and saw himself sitting on his bed, thumb in mouth, while he spelled out the adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

Here was an inspiration! What of a Cockney Sancho? Such a servant could guard the innocent Pickwick, provide a channel for wise but whimsical observations on life, carry the story into regions where the Pickwicks and Winkles could not penetrate.

Charles leaped up from his desk in triumph. Kate was with her parents at a concert, but Mary sat by the window, sewing.

"I've found my man," he cried, and explained his idea to her.

"I knew you'd invent some one," she smiled.

"How shall we make him talk?"

"Like Mr. Potter?" she suggested.

"There's enough Potter in Jingle, my dear."

She puckered her brow.

"Oh, Charles, who's that actor whom you mimic so funnily? The one who always says so-and-so, as the so-and-so said when so-and-so?"

"My dear lucid Mary, you mean Sam Vale."

"That's right. Why not make your character talk like him?"

"Vot a werry clever girl it is, as the risin' young author said to his pretty stepsister v'en she give him the notion. Splendid! We'll call my man Sam, eh, like his original. Sam what? Sam . . .? Sam . . .? I've got it. My nurse's name was Mary Weller—beautiful name Mary! We'll call our friend Sam Weller; and a slap-up-Cockney-pot-wallopin'-housemaid-huggin'-beggin'-your-pardon-miss-young-out-an'-outer he shall be!"

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He sent for Browne and, persuading him to call himself "Phiz" on the analogy of "Boz," set him to draw Sam Weller. When they had one to their liking, Charles worked him into the story; and the little household was cheerful once more.

As soon as the instalment was written, Charles read it to the sisters and, their laughter in his ears, hastened to his publishers.

"Pretty good, my boy," commented Chapman. "This Weller feller ought to pull you out of the ditch, if I'm any judge of form."

But Hall shook his head doubtfully.

"I hope he won't make us lose any more money, Mr. Boz," he said.

The strain of waiting for Sam's debut oppressed the three young people. Charles grew irritable; Kate, weakened by the sultry June days, found herself not always able to soothe him. Only Mary never failed to bring him comfort and repose.

He came home late from the *Chronicle* on the fateful day of publication, and they saw by his expression that things had gone ill.

"I called on Hall this afternoon," he sighed. "They've only sold the usual hundred. Oh, my dears, why doesn't *Pickwick* sell?"

"Wait a day or two, Charles," said Mary. "You can't tell yet what will happen."

He refused to be comforted, however, and next morning the girls could not persuade him to begin drafting the fifth number of the book. He waited, idle and moping, for the hour when he must go to the newspaper office.

A sudden clamor roused him. Some one rushed up-stairs, shouting. The noise came nearer, and culminated in an ear-shattering knock at the door. Charles lifted the latch cautiously and was hurled against the wall as Ainsworth burst in, waving a copy of *Pickwick* above his head.

"Congratulations, congratulations, my dear Dickens," he shouted. "Congratulations, Kate! Congratulations, Mary! Congratulations, kitten! Congratulations, everybody!"

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"What on earth is the matter, Mr. Ainsworth?" asked Kate.

"*Pickwick!*" exclaimed Mary.

"Of course, it's *Pickwick*," cried Ainsworth. "*Pickwick* of *Pickwicks*, all is *Pickwick*! Sold out, my boy! Not a copy to be had for love or money! I met Chapman in the street; he's keeping the printers at work day and night. Weller's turned the trick for you at last!"

Charles clasped his friend's hand, embraced his wife and Mary, tossed the kitten on top of a cupboard, and threw a somersault in his glee.

"I've not been so pleased since *Rookwood*," said the visitor, laughing at his antics.

"Let's hope *Pickwick* sells half as well as that did, you kind Mr. Ainsworth," said Kate.

"Let's hope it knocks *Rookwood* into a cocked hat," cried Charles.

Ainsworth carried him off for a tour of the bookshops. He had not exaggerated; the town was *Pickwick* mad. The booksellers declared that they had never experienced anything like the rush for it; purchasers lined up outside their shops to await new supplies from the printers; every reader demanded to know when the three preceding parts would be reprinted.

The young men found Hall almost beside himself; the unexpected success flustered him as much as the earlier failure. Chapman shook his visitors' hands warmly and invited them to dinner. There was no question of Charles' going to the *Chronicle* that day.

"You're the luckiest young feller that ever I saw," Chapman declared, when the port and cigars were on the table. "Ain't he, Ainsworth? And it's all due to our humble friend, Sam Weller—God bless him!"

"It was fortunate that I saw he was needed," replied Charles innocently; and Chapman, catching Ainsworth's eye, winked at him.

Charles' triumph was intoxicating, incredible. *Pickwick* sold and sold, and the printers could not satisfy the book-

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sellers' demands. The publishers forwarded bundle after bundle of letters to Furnival's Inn, and he read them to the sisters. There were congratulatory letters, critical letters, anonymous letters, abusive letters, begging letters, indecipherable letters, letters from madmen. There were letters also from illiterate admirers, written for them by the friend or child whom they had engaged to read out *Pickwick*; they thanked Charles with all their heart for the joy he was bringing into their humdrum lives.

Mr. Giles, his old schoolmaster at Chatham, sent a warm letter of praise, reminding Charles that he had always prophesied fame for his favorite pupil. He added that, in his own observation, *Pickwick* was reaching a new public and being read by innumerable men and women who had never before opened a book. As a token of his admiration, he enclosed a silver snuff-box, which had come down to him from his grandfather; on its lid was engraved an inscription to "the Inimitable Boz."

"That's a fust-rate name—the Inimitable, eh?" laughed Charles. "Fits me like a glove, it do. And since I'm the Inimitable, my loves, I've decided to live up to it. I told Black at the office to-day that he won't see me no more arter I've drawn my pay at the end of the month. No more reportin' for the Inimitable, my gals; he goes v're fame and fortune wait him!"

In the mornings now he could sit at ease, writing the next instalment of *Pickwick*, reading his vast correspondence, and consulting with Browne, his artist, whose shyness had now almost melted before Kate's good nature. In the afternoons he showed Kate and Mary the symbols of his fame in the shop-windows: there were *Pickwick* hats and *Pickwick* stocks, *Pickwick* coats, *Pickwick* cigars and *Pickwick* song-books, Weller corduroys and Weller gaiters. Boz hackney-cabs appeared in the streets; the Bath coaches, with their owner's name, *Pickwick*, on the doors, attracted enthusiastic attention. In the evenings he dined with friends and lion-hunters who sought his company at their table, repeating afterward to the sisters all the praises showered on him.

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He leaped into the room one afternoon, flinging his hat into the air, and announced that he had marvelous news.

"I've signed a new agreement," he said. "Your pa introduced me to Bentley, the publisher, and I'm to edit a monthly *Miscellany* which he's starting. Yes, my dears, the Inimitable's blossoming out as an editor, a reg'lar full-blown-reach-me-down editor. Twenty pounds a month, and nothing to do but give orders. And I'm to write three novels for Bentley, for five hundred golden sovereigns apiece. We shall be rich, my darlings, rich as young Croeshushes!"

"How marvelous, Charles!" cried Mary, clapping her hands.

"I suppose Mr. Hall will not object," said Kate.

"Oh, Kate, don't be absurd," exclaimed her husband. "Why should Hall object? What do I care if he does object? What right has he to be considered? I suppose you think, as he does, that he and Chapman have got me in their pocket—their tame scribbler, eh?"

"In any case," Kate said, "you have to write your Gordon Riots novel for Mr. Macrone before Christmas. I see he's already announced it."

"Macrone can whistle for it. I do believe, Kate, you'd like to see me slaving away, just as if *Pickwick* had never happened."

"I shall always be grateful to Mr. Macrone and Mr. Hall for believing in you when you were unknown," said Kate.

"Publishers and gratitude, my love, are strange bed-fellows. You leave all those things to me, and don't worry your pretty head about them. The Inimitable knows vot he's a-doin' of, don't he, Mary?"

"You oughtn't to discuss business arrangements, Kate dear," said Mary. "How should we understand them?"

"Very well, then," said Kate. "Let us talk about something else." And she returned to the tiny garment she was knitting.

She rejoiced as much as he in *Pickwick's* triumph but, level-headed young woman that she was, she knew his weakness and dreaded lest adulation should unbalance him. She

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feared for his poise, his sense of values. The same evening she hinted a warning by ridiculing an extravagant letter of praise from an admirer; he reddened with astonished anger, and turned pointedly to Mary for sympathy.

He was startled to detect in his wife's voice a tinge of dissatisfaction. Uncomprehending, he tried to bribe her by lavishing his new wealth on her and Mary. When a check for five hundred pounds arrived from Chapman and Hall as a first installment of his profits, he sent the sisters to buy smart gowns and bonnets, and himself invested in a whole wardrobe of new clothes.

Chapman and Hall behaved very well over his defection to Bentley, but they were hurt by it. Macrone too was furious at the absence of the promised novel, but Charles snapped his fingers. Mary laughed at his defiance, but Kate would not applaud him.

She was relieved, however, to find that his success did not interfere with his capacity for work. He finished two plays and arranged for their production at the St. James' Theater, and labored conscientiously on a serial which he was preparing for the *Miscellany*, the story of a workhouse orphan named Oliver Twist. Charles intended to expose in it the inhumanities of the new Poor Law. He discussed its situations and characters with the sisters, and declared that Kate was the soundest judge in the world and Mary the most inspired source of suggestions. The story thrilled him, but he confessed, when his second play, an operetta called *The Village Coquettes*, was produced at the theater, that he wished the stage paid its writers better.

"If a good play fetched its author more than a miserable hundred pounds, the Sparkler would drop novel-writing altogether," he said.

"Who's the Sparkler?" asked Mary.

"I'm the Sparkler, my love," he laughed, "the sparkling young Inimitable."

In the first week of the new year Kate bore him a son, of whom Charles was as proud as of *Pickwick*. He walked with Mary up and down Holborn in search of a table for the

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bedroom, marveling at the baby's beauty, his intelligence and his amazing resemblance to himself.

Before long, however, he was irritated by the fuss surrounding the baby's arrival; the procession of nurses, relatives and inquirers interfered with his work. Mr. and Mrs. Hogarth seemed to spend all their time at Furnival's Inn, and he found them wearisome.

"Mary dear," he said, "I am fond of your parents, but do you think you could persuade them not to come here quite so often? My father and mother don't sit on my door-step all day—you know I spoke to them quite firmly—and, after all, they are just as much interested in the baby."

Mary took her parents aside and urged on them Charles' need of quiet. They accepted her suggestion that they should visit Kate only in the afternoons, when he was usually at the office of the *Miscellany*.

He was happy. The first instalment of *Oliver Twist* seemed to him as good as anything he had written; *Pickwick* was still increasing its sales; he relished his authority as editor of the *Miscellany*; money rolled in. He had the baby christened Charles and Boz, after himself, and took the young household for a short holiday to the Kentish cottage which he loved for its honeymoon associations.

"This is the last time we go back to Furnival's Inn, my dears," he said, as they packed to return to town.

"Why, Charles?" Kate asked.

"How would you like a house of your own? In Bloomsbury, all among the humbugs and the svells? Where we can give dinner-parties, and I can have a proper study for my work?"

"I should like a nursery for Baby. Will you let me try to find a nice little house? I'd feel so proud, looking for one."

"As a matter of fact, dear, I've already taken one. You'll adore it. It's in Doughty Street, near the Foundling Hospital."

"You've settled everything, without consulting me?—Charles!"

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"I waved a magic wand, my love." He imitated the quavering voice of a pantaloon. "'Vot have we here?—V'y, my dear Jemmy, upon my soul I do declare it's a house! We move in next month."

"Isn't Bloomsbury very expensive?"

"Leave that to the Sparkler of Albion!"

Charles superintended every detail of the move. He overruled his wife in the choice of furniture and fittings; decided who should occupy which room; insisted on being consulted in everything. Not even a nail could be hammered into the wall without his approval.

Though he sometimes took Mary's advice, he rarely advised with Kate.

"You look after Master Charley," he said, "and his father'll look after you. Watch the Inimitable carefully! He's full of surprises."

His surprises took many forms, from rearranging the nursery furniture to the provision of magnificent presents.

"Kate, Kate, come down at once!" Mary called to her one morning. "Look what Charles has bought for us!"

It was a tiny chaise with two diminutive gray ponies.

"This is Pickwick and t'other is Oliver," said Charles introducing them. "I did think of calling them Chapman and Hall, but I thought they might jib. Give a horse a bad name, you know—— Quick, girls, jump in!"

"May we drive ourselves, Charles?" Kate asked.

"That's the werry notion."

He gave the groom an extravagant tip, and the sisters drove up the street, Charles running beside them. Before they had gone a hundred yards, he was convulsed with laughter. The ponies trotted away, stopped dead, started off again, swerved to the right or the left, exactly as they wished and without the slightest attention to Kate's handling of the reins.

"I *am* pulling the left rein," she said, half laughing, half crying, when he shouted a direction to her. "They won't do what they're told. There! Now they've stopped again."

"Let Mary try," he suggested.

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Immediately the ponies decided to behave themselves, and became obedient to Mary's least touch. She trotted them to the end of the street, turned them round smartly and stopped them again at the very door of the house.

"Why couldn't you do that, Kate?" he asked almost contemptuously.

In future, Mary usually drove the chaise, and in it she and Kate and the baby accompanied Charles when he rode out on horseback to the country.

Returning one afternoon from a drive to Richmond, they were caught in a shower and reached Doughty Street wet through. Charles planned to take the sisters to the theater in the evening. Mary's teeth were chattering and she felt ill; she would have preferred to go to bed, but, rather than disappoint him, she agreed to see the play.

Her pain increased at the theater; she shivered in all her limbs and, though Charles gave her brandy, which eased her for a time, she could not sleep. By the morning, she lay in a high fever. He sat by the bedside, holding her hand and trying to comfort her while they waited for the doctor.

The Hogarths' family physician, a bluff old gentleman who still affected knee-breeches and white stockings, entered the room cheerfully, declaring that nothing could be the matter but the effects of the wetting. Charles waited on the landing, impatiently listening to his voice and Mary's moans. The doctor's face had lost its smiling confidence when he came out of the room and told Charles:

"I don't like it at all. It looks more serious than we expected. I think you ought to send for her father and mother."

"You don't think that she's really ill, Doctor? You can't think she's in danger?"

"I can't say yet, Mr. Dickens."

He returned to his patient. Kate had already fetched her parents, and Charles, tiptoeing miserably down-stairs, found Mr. and Mrs. Hogarth in his study.

They shook hands in silence. Mrs. Hogarth wiped her eyes. Charles jumped up when the door opened, but it was only Kate inviting her mother to come and see the baby.

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"Is the *Miscellany* doing well?" asked Hogarth at last.

"Very well," replied Charles.

"I like *Oliver Twist* better than *Pickwick*. *Pickwick* still selling?"

"The latest number has sold best of all."

Hogarth glanced at the bookshelf.

"Are these your books?"

Charles was irritated by his question. Of course, they were his books; whose else could they be?

Hogarth inspected the titles.

"H'm," he said, "you've a strange taste." He pulled a book out and glanced at the title page. "Oh, I understand. They're all presentation copies from your publishers."

"It's bad enough to write books, without buying them," snapped Charles. "You're quite right. They're all new and worthless. I've no good books."

"Every young man should build up a library," said Hogarth sententiously.

Confound the man's smug Scottish airs! Could he not understand Charles' agony for the dear girl up-stairs?

The doctor entered. Mary, he said, was dying.

Charles forced his way past his father-in-law, and rushed to her room. She lay barely conscious, recognizing no one. He saw her nostrils dilate as she breathed, now rapidly, now slowly and with a long pause before each labored breath.

He kneeled beside her, weeping. The doctor sat on the other side of the bed, his hand on her pulse, watching the rise and fall of her bosom. He moistened her lips with brandy; and her eyes gradually opened, shining bright and anxious from her placid face.

She saw Charles, and her whole being focused on him. He moved closer, and she lost him. Bewilderment entered her eyes till they rested on him again. Then she made an almost imperceptible movement of her hand.

He seized it, murmuring endearments, imploring her to rouse and speak to him.

Did she understand? He felt a faint pressure of her fingers and imagined that he heard her whisper his name.

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Her pulse grew stronger; color flooded her cheeks, and, suddenly, as if in answer to a call, she half rose in the bed.

He clasped her, drawing her to him.

"Oh, Mary, Mary! Dearest!" he sobbed.

She drew a long sighing breath. Her flush faded, and she sank back limp in his arms.

CHAPTER TEN

EVEN amid her own sorrow, Kate was amazed by her husband's uncontrollable grief for Mary. Day after day he wandered through the house, pale and tearful. She found him brooding over the dead girl's ring which he had taken from her cold finger and placed upon his own. He begged her mother for a braid of Mary's hair, cut off before the funeral. She tried to calm him with endearments and caresses, but nothing helped.

Yet he had one consolation. He dreamed every night of Mary. His sleep was fitful and uneasy, but, when it came, it brought visions of Mary. Some instinct warned him not to speak of his dreams, and even Kate knew nothing of them.

"My darling," she said to him, after another broken night, "you really must finish the next *Pickwick*. The printers will call for it to-morrow."

"It's useless. I've tried to work, but I can think of nothing. How can I write a humorous story at such a time as this? I tell you it's impossible. I can't work."

The printers came, and were disappointed. He roused himself to call on Hall, and explain what had happened. Anxious but resigned, the publisher agreed to postpone the next instalment of the book for a month. And Bentley agreed to a temporary stoppage of *Oliver Twist*.

"We must go away from here, Kate," Charles said. "Everything in this house reminds me of poor Mary. Let's drive out to Hampstead and find rooms."

The ponies were more provoking than ever that morning, as if they missed Mary's touch on the reins. But Charles drove them to Hampstead, and secured rooms in a farmhouse near Jack Straw's Castle, on the highest point of the heath. There, with Kate and the baby, he remained for several

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weeks. He slept better for the change of scene, still dreaming of Mary every night, but his melancholy persisted. Kate, alarmed, wrote to Ainsworth and blessed him for a true friend when he instantly replied.

"Ainsworth says he is coming to dinner with us this afternoon, Charles," she announced. "He's bringing a friend with him."

"What a thoughtless creature he is!" said her husband. "He ought to realize that I'm in no mood to make fresh acquaintances."

"It's a Mr. Forster."

"Forster? Ah, yes," said Charles, with a note of liveliness in his voice. "He's a critic, a capital fellow. I met him at Ainsworth's for a moment at Christmas, and he told me he liked *Pickwick* immensely. What time will they be here?"

Forster was a sturdy young man, tightly buttoned into a frock coat, with a strong, decided, square face and tousled hair. His manner was severe, as befitted one who had been the pride of his grammar school and an ornament of the newly founded university in London, and who took himself, and was taken, very seriously as a critic of literature and the theater. He spoke either very loud or very softly, but always with a slight north-country accent.

Ainsworth, knowing that Forster had just emerged from a luckless love-affair with the notorious poetess, Miss Landon, had sought to ease two griefs by bringing him and Charles together, and was delighted that they took to each other immediately.

"Your face seems strangely familiar to me, Mr. Dickens," said Forster after a while.

"I don't know that we ever met until that dinner at Ainsworth's a few weeks ago."

"I've got it. I saw you when you led the reporters on the *True Sun*. You were standing at the foot of the staircase; I was at the top, with the editor."

"Of course," cried Charles. "There, Kate, doesn't that show you? I'm always telling you of the extraordinary coincidences that happen to me and to no one else, and here's

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one of them before your very eyes. What a small world it is!"

Ainsworth and Kate could hardly separate the two new friends that evening. Each found in the other an anodyne for his painful memories. They were well suited; the critic admired Charles' agile mind and humorous vision, and Charles recognized, not without envy, that Forster had all the solid qualities of education and knowledge which he himself lacked.

"What a manly fellow Forster is!" he told Kate as they prepared themselves for bed. "I've never met any one who grasped my ideas so readily; whatever we talked about, he saw my point as soon as I hinted it. Yes, and he's worth twenty Ainsworths. Ainsworth's going down-hill; the success of *Rookwood* must have spoiled him, but the poor fellow don't know it. I told Forster so."

The encounter healed Charles' distemper. Next morning he felt a desire to work, and pined for his accustomed surroundings at Doughty Street. They returned there at once, and he took up again the threads of *Pickwick* and *Oliver Twist*.

As the summer went by, Forster became his closest friend. Charles exercised his humor in elaborating nicknames for him, suggested by his physical and mental solidity. Thus, he was "The Elephant" and, by an easy association of ideas, "The Pride of the Jungle," "The Rajah's Charger," "The Howdah-do," and, from his residence in Lincoln's Inn Fields, "The Lincolnshire Mammoth." Forster accepted these sallies with patience and even with pride, for he saw that the young author was coming to rely on him with almost feminine dependence.

Charles begged Forster to introduce him to literary and theatrical celebrities, to read and amend his manuscripts, to be his banker and his agent. Soon he could not even amuse himself, unless the kindly, rough-tongued critic accompanied him. He drifted into the habit of summoning Forster at any hour on any pretext, and the faithful friend appeared, hastily rearranging all his engagements.

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"I don't know how I ever got along without Forster," Charles told Kate. "I can turn myself inside out to him, and he has a solution for every problem. He's just what I need in my life."

On bright mornings the two friends hired horses and rode to Kensal Green, breakfasted at Ainsworth's house and went on in his company through green lanes and orchards to Acton to dine with Bulwer Lytton.

Charles was vain of his acquaintance with Bulwer. Poet, satirist, dandy, scion of an ancient county family, author of successful novels, member of Parliament—all this at thirty-four—he belonged to a world which Charles had as yet only glimpsed. Bulwer's suave, aristocratic voice, his easy magnificence of manner, his superlative taste in dress and decoration, all impressed Charles with a sense of his own triumph. The ragged drudge in a blacking factory to become the intimate of such a man!

In one respect Charles felt himself superior to Bulwer. He knew the story of the latter's domestic disaster. Married young, and at the expense of his family allowance, to a dashing Irish beauty, he had become the butt of her private ill-temper and public abuse until, only a year before, they had broken up their home and she had gone her own way, breathing slander and threats against him.

How much of his advantage of wealth and position, Charles wondered, would Bulwer not gladly have sacrificed to possess a wife so dutiful as Kate!

It never entered his head that Kate might be critical of him. He could not have believed that his overwhelming grief at Mary's death had made her wonder if she filled his life as completely as he and the baby filled hers. Nor did he understand, as she did, that his success was raising a barrier between them. He gave so much thought to his fame, to his social position, to his income. He began to talk of the public for whom he wrote, of his duty to them, of his message. She could not reconcile herself to his increasing absence from home, his constant quest for new acquaintances.

She feared that she was declining from a partner to an

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incident in his life, and her misgivings were strengthened by a conversation with her mother-in-law one evening, when Charles was dining out.

"Charles is *so* proud of the baby," Kate told her visitor.

"I'm sure his father was always proud of *him*," replied Mrs. Dickens, "though I do remember hearing John remark, when Augustus was born—such a troublesome baby he was!—that a mess of pottage might often be more acceptable to an embarrassed household than a succession of first-born."

"I believe Charles is delighted to have some one fresh whom he can love."

"I quite agree with you, my dear. Charles is a kind of convolvulus, wholly wrapped up in himself. Not that he is unkind—he is very affectionate when he wants to be—but he never stops to think that other people exist, except when he takes an interest in them. I remember that my cousin Sir John, who is a great philosopher, used to maintain that nothing existed unless you believed it did, and one evening he fell into a well which he didn't know was there, and has never really cared to drink out of it again."

"You mean," said Kate, "that Charles looks upon his circle as a stage for his actions, and as an audience for his sentiments."

"You have put my meaning into a bombshell, my dear Kate," exclaimed Mrs. Dickens. "Now let me see the little darling once more, and I must go home. Augustus, that tantalizing child, is in bed with the croup and may set the house on fire at any moment."

Kate watched her husband across the table, with its expensive new silver and decanters, at the dinners which they gave at Doughty Street, and saw with mingled pride and misgiving how he seized every excuse to lead the conversation. He indulged in long monologues which were a farrago of slang, puns, reminiscences—he had a marvelous memory—accounts of theatrical performances, and sly imitations of curious types whom he had encountered. All other subjects bored him, and he cut short his guests when they strayed from the familiar topics.

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Forster was the only man who dared to contradict him, but even he encouraged Charles to monopolize the talk, chuckling at his jokes, and gazing triumphantly from face to face as if he were a showman and Charles his exhibit.

Not every visitor whom Forster brought, cared to submit to the egotism of a man of twenty-five, even though he was the author of *Pickwick*. There was a violent scene one evening when Walter Savage Landor, the hot-tempered poet, objected to his host's facetious interruptions. Though Forster calmed him, he rarely accepted Charles' later invitations. But Ainsworth came often, as did Macready, the handsome, irascible actor, and Talfourd, a bland, moon-faced lawyer and playwright.

Daniel Maclise, a young Irish painter who had burst from poverty into fame hardly less remarkably than Charles', added his handsome presence and simple admiration to these parties. His keen eyes would fasten on his host, and Kate noticed how Charles smoothed his hair and fingered his stock lest Maclise should see him not at his best.

Of Charles' earlier friends only Mitton, now a solicitor, and occasionally Thomas Beard, the *Chronicle* reporter, were invited. He knew no others capable of adapting themselves to his altered circumstances and his lavish dinners.

Amid applauding guests, he was all gaiety. He showed naive delight in his house, his family, his cook and his company. He gloried that men of distinction, most of them his seniors, accepted his hospitality and permitted him to take first place among them. But often, when they dispersed, and he and Kate were left alone, he lapsed into a stupor of melancholy, caused by some chance recollection of Mary.

One night he burst into tears, as Forster and Talfourd, the last of his guests, left the house.

"You're working too hard, my dear," Kate said, comforting him. "It's bad for you to sit at your desk, and smoke so many cigars and drink so much sherry."

"It's not the work I mind, so much as the poor return it brings," he replied. "*Pickwick's* nearly at an end, and that—thank God!—finishes me with Chapman and Hall. But I was

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a headstrong fool ever to sign those agreements with Bentley. Look at the result! Here am I writing *Oliver Twist* for him, editing his paper for him, slaving at I don't know how many articles for him, correcting other people's work for him—and generally making a fortune for him. He snared me before I knew my real worth. He tricked me. Let him catch another young fool in his net! He'll get no more of my novels!"

"I thought you were bound for two more after *Oliver*," said Kate.

"Bound or not, I won't write another line for him when *Oliver's* finished!"

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that, Charles. You know how pleased you were at first with his offer. Why don't you ask Mr. Forster if something can't be done?"

"That's not a bad notion. Solemn, old, tactful Forster's just the man. I'll send for him in the morning, and then, my dear, you and I will take a holiday abroad."

"Abroad? But what about Baby?"

"He can stay with your mother, or mine. It'll be for only a few days. So not another word! The Sparkler and his blushing bride are going to see the Continong."

Forster, promptly obedient, opened the campaign with Bentley. Negotiations were difficult, for the publisher felt himself aggrieved. Eventually, however, he agreed to waive his rights to one novel altogether, and postpone the other for a year. This was the story of the Gordon Riots, which Charles had previously contracted to write for Macrone. The latter now sprang a surprise by declaring his intention to reissue the *Sketches by Boz* in monthly parts, in exact imitation of *Pickwick*. Charles, furiously indignant, sent Forster to him.

"Macrone is impossible," Forster declared. "He says that, as he has not received *Gabriel Vardon*, he proposes to recoup himself out of the *Sketches*."

"The canting hypocrite!" cried Charles. "My public will think that I'm presuming on *Pickwick* to foist the *Sketches* on them again, just to put money in my pocket."

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"But the money will go into Macrone's pocket, not yours."

"My public won't know that. I may be quixotic," said Charles solemnly, "but I'm determined to keep faith with them. How can we checkmate the scoundrel?"

"He hinted that he might sell you back the copyright."

"For how much?"

"He talks in thousands of pounds."

"Thousands of humbugs!"

"I at least will not be a party to such an imposition," cried Forster. "I will send Hall to see him, if you like. Hall may be glad to advance the money, especially since he knows you're dissatisfied with Bentley."

Charles grinned. "The Inimitable's value is going up, eh? Well, I place everything in your hands, my Jungle Pride. And you may tell Hall that I'm the last man in the world to forget an obligation."

Leaving Forster to settle the matter for him, Charles took Kate and Browne to the Continent for a short holiday. None of them had ever been abroad before, and even Charles was awed at the adventure. But he laughed and joked all the way to Dover. Not even the stuffy, jolting coach could subdue him. He maintained a vivacious monologue in mock French, heedless that Kate dozed with her head on his shoulder, while Browne gazed yawning through the window.

For five hours the little sailing-packet beat her way across the choppy straits, alternately burying her nose in a flurry of foam and shuddering with her bowsprit pointed to the clouds.

Half an hour of this reduced Charles and Kate to helpless misery. As he sat huddled on deck, torn by spasms of sickness, terrified by the creaking and straining sounds of the vessel, he wished that he had been content to stay at home.

Browne, by some strange immunity, enjoyed the crossing. Wrapped in a greatcoat, he hovered near Charles, clinging to the rail and watching the waves and the changing sky. The ship's officers came and stood by his side, as if they sensed, in his inarticulate shyness, a nature akin to their own.

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Calais tossed tantalizingly in front of them for an hour before the little vessel ran into the harbor, between the breakwater and the long, crazy wooden jettý. When at last the boat was moored to her berth, Charles and Kate had scarcely strength to stand.

Browne, in a paroxysm of diffidence, dragged them ashore. In the Customs, however, he turned to Charles, who, wan and crumpled, leaned against a wall, supporting Kate.

"Dickens," he stammered desperately, "I can't! You must!"

Charles opened his eyes, lurched to the counter, and held fast to it, while duty officials rapidly emptied their bags, ferreted through the contents, and crammed them back again haphazard. He was too weak, and Browne too nervous, to remonstrate.

"This Phiz of mine's about as much use as a sun-dial in a coal-mine," he told Kate in a cozy sitting-room at their inn. "It's a pity I brought him along."

"Poor man," said Kate. "He can't help being shy, any more than you and I could help being seasick."

"Maybe you're right, as Noah said v'en they told him it vos raining. I only hope that he don't spoil our larks."

Next morning they felt well enough to explore Calais, and set off with the silent Browne for a walk through the town.

Everything was strange. The streets paved with stone cobbles; the tall narrow houses with their shuttered windows, painted haphazard in a medley of colors; the dogs drawing bakers' carts; the blue blouses and sabots of the workmen; the wine-shop at each corner; the vast lumbering coaches—all stimulated Charles to a flow of humorous observation.

"Ain't it rum and old-fashioned?" he laughed, as they returned to their inn for dinner.

"But how picturesque!" said Kate.

"These Froggies don't know what Progress means," he continued. "Everything about 'em is fifty years out of date. I can see only one quality in which they're superior to us—they're a sober lot for all their shrieking and gesticulating. I

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haven't seen a drunken man yet in the whole of this fossilized rabbit-warren."

They met a smartly dressed Frenchman at the inn who spoke tolerable English and, hindered rather than assisted by Charles' French, invited them to accompany him to a park where the townspeople danced in the open air.

"Ain't he a swell, a-tvirlin' round a blessed v'ip-top?" Charles chuckled, as the stranger left them to waltz with a lady.

"Who do you think he is?" asked Kate.

"Some local duke, my dear, or else a nobleman from Paris with lots o' money, and nothing to do with it except bore himself to death."

They parted cordially from him, and returned to the inn.

"What a life that man must lead!" Charles commented. "Always restlessly searching for distraction, always more and more bored. There's a story to be written round him."

He rang for his slippers. The familiar face of their French acquaintance appeared at the door. He had removed his frock coat and covered his fine waistcoat with a white apron.

"What the devil!" cried Charles. "Who are you?"

"I am ze Boots," he replied. "M'sieu' desires?"

They drove off by post-chaise for a hurried trip through Ghent and Bruges to Brussels. Charles received a confused impression of a flat hedgeless countryside intersected by dikes, of slow-moving peasants, of guttural Flemish conversations at the end of each stage while the horses were changed, of endless sand-dunes stretching away to the sea, of rows of poplars bordering the straight roads, of alternate prosperity and desolation.

The towns raised Browne to an ecstasy of admiration, and, losing his shyness, he lectured his companions on their architecture, Charles breaking in with facetious comments.

Less than a week after leaving Calais, they sailed from Antwerp for home.

This time the passage was calm, and Charles pretended to be a boatswain, issuing orders to Browne in nautical slang

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which he had picked up from books of adventure, hauling on ropes, and dancing an occasional hornpipe.

"Furrin parts has set up the Sparkler with a new lease o' life, my brazen-faced Jove," he told the artist, when they reached London. "He's taken to 'em natural, and made up his great mind to frequent 'em reg'lar in future."

His hilarity increased when, in their bedroom at Doughty Street, Kate told him that she was again to become a mother.

"The more the merrier, my dear," he said, kissing her. "We'll soon have a dozen little Inimitables about the house."

Forster's negotiations had prospered in their absence. Hall, acting ostensibly on Charles' behalf, bought back the copyright of the *Sketches* from Macrone for two thousand pounds. Charles, dismissing his earlier scruples about republication, at once agreed to a Chapman and Hall issue of the *Sketches* in monthly parts.

He had the consolation of knowing that he would share in the profits.

So far as Bentley was concerned, Charles was to work off part of his obligation—before writing *Barnaby Rudge*, as he now proposed to call the novel on the Gordon Riots—by editing the memoirs of Grimaldi, the clown, who had recently died. The material for the book had been collected from the dead man's papers.

"It only wants knocking into shape," Charles told Kate. "Naturally, I don't intend to do that myself."

"Will it be very difficult?" she asked.

"It only requires ordinary intelligence—and leisure."

"Your father called this morning," she added, after a silence. "He said that he would not disturb you at your work, but—poor dear, I'm afraid he has run into debt again."

"Oh, he's preposterous! Was ever a son so burdened as I am? Talk of the Prodigal Son—what price my prodigal pa? I'm at the end of my patience with him."

"Don't be angry, dear; he's so sweet with me and Charley, and so gratified with your success. I was wondering if he couldn't help you with Grimaldi."

"He?—I don't know, though, but what you're right. If

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only I could persuade him to use English instead of that fustian he affects. Let's send for him."

John arrived.

"Like the ancient bard, my dear Charles," he said, "whose name for the moment escapes me,—but it is of no consequence,—I consider nothing human to lie outside my cognition. You are asking me to reproduce the intellectual processes of the lamented Grimaldi. That, if I may use a vulgar expression, is a facer. You ask me to descend from the Mother of Parliaments to the child of the sawdust.—What is the remuneration?"

"You'll be well paid."

"That assurance touches me to the quick, my dear boy—the quicker the better, if I may say so. It happens that, by a syzygy of malign catastrophes, I find myself at the moment in a position of some financial stringency. Man proposes; Providence jilts him. A promising speculation, on which I recently embarked with a portion of my pension, has, I regret to say, failed to keep its promise. I will gladly, therefore, undertake the duties of your amanuensis. I will weave the humble phraseology of our deceased favorite into a garland of immortal prose."

"I don't want immortal prose, father. Just good, manly, newspaper English."

"Not even a certain flavor of artistry—the artistry which hides from its right hand what its left hand is doing?"

"No, just plain facts and anecdotes."

He gave John a table in the room which had been Mary's. The old gentleman struggled with his task, confiding gloomily to Kate that he feared Grimaldi would never have made a classic writer.

Charles helped him, in the intervals of editorial work, of completing *Oliver Twist* and of drafting a new novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*. To gather local color for a villainous schoolmaster in *Nickleby*, he made a hurried trip to Yorkshire.

His nightly dreams of Mary grew even more vivid on this journey. He woke one night with so real a sense of her

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presence that he could no longer keep his secret, and described the vision in a letter to Kate.

To his chagrin, the dreams ceased from that time. It seemed almost as if Kate had robbed him of his communion with her sister.

He prayed that the child she was expecting should be a girl. Perhaps dear Mary's spirit, which no longer appeared to him at night, would pass into the baby, and so be with him again.

Soon after his return to London, Kate was confined. She bore a girl!

Joyfully Charles sent for Forster, and celebrated the fulfillment of his prayers by riding out to an inn at Barnet, where they sat late over a hearty dinner, toasting the new Mary.

"Will she not be christened Catherine after her mother?" Forster asked.

"No, Mary, Mary, Mary! And, if her nature as well as her name is Mary's, why, she'll mean more to me than anybody, even you, could understand."

He poured himself another glass of port.

On the road back to town both their horses went lame, and Charles did not reach Doughty Street till past midnight. His mother opened the door to him, grim disapproval in her face.

"What? Aren't you in bed, mother?" he asked with affected ease.

"How could I go to bed with a quiet conscience, when poor Kate has been fretting about you all the evening?" she replied. "You may be a jolly good fellow and an auld lang syne, as your father always says when Parliament sits late, but I think it downright wicked of you to frighten your wife in this junketing way. She was sure that something dreadful had happened to you."

"Is it my fault that the horse went lame?"

"That I really could not tell you, Charles. I am not a Mazeppa."

"Tcha! Is Kate really distressed?"

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"She has cried herself to sleep.—No, you mustn't go in and wake her now; you've behaved badly enough for one day."

Deeply contrite, he took his work next morning to Kate's room and explained the mischance which had delayed him overnight.

"I was so frightened," she said. "I felt sure that you wouldn't stay away from me, unless an accident had happened to you."

"Nor would I, my darling," he replied.

"I am so happy when you are here," she said wistfully, holding his hand. "I love to have you beside me, even when you are busy and have no time to talk. Except on our holidays, dear Charles, I see so little of you now."

"I have to think of my public, dear. And you know that I wish to earn money for you and the babies."

"We were so happy when we had less money."

"We shall be happier when we have more. Besides, think how I can help others with my books."

"You're so good and kind, Charles."

"I'd be better and kinder if it weren't for Bentley."

"But, darling, I thought your troubles with him were past."

"I hoped they were, but they're not. I can't be everlastingly humbugged by him about *Barnaby Rudge*, when I want all my powers for *Nickleby*. I simply can't finish *Barnaby* by November, as he wishes."

"Then why not put off *Nickleby* until you've written *Barnaby*?"

"Because, you dear, unbusinesslike creature, Nick will bring in a dozen times what I should get for the other."

"Will this mean another broken contract, Charles?"

He nodded, and she turned her head away.

"Oh, my love," she said, "I wish you could avoid breaking your word to these men."

Her blindness vexed him.

"And I wish, Kate," he said, "that you could understand my position. You're intensely aggravating!—I'm sorry I

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was angry, dear. Forgive me! But you really must learn not to interfere. Just devote yourself to picking up your strength, and we'll soon go away for another jolly holiday."

Bentley stormed, Forster negotiated, Charles sulked.

He took Kate to Richmond, where he worked hard on *Nickleby*, but gave no thought to *Barnaby Rudge*. The day on which the first instalment of *Nickleby* was to be published, he paced up and down beside the river, devoured by anxiety. His whole future, he knew, depended on the fate of this story.

Kate assured him that it could not fail, after he had been to such pains with it, but he repeated to himself the criticism of the *Quarterly Review* that he was writing too much and too quickly, and that "he has risen like a rocket, and he will come down like a stick."

By the afternoon he could wait no longer. He rode to London and sought out Forster.

They returned to Richmond in the small hours, singing lustily, to find Kate shivering in the cold deserted hall of the hotel.

"Vot do you mean by taking such liberties with your precious health?" cried Charles.

"I couldn't sleep until I heard your news," she replied. "Thank goodness, I can see from your faces that *Nickleby* has done well."

"Done vell, my dear? Nick's done super-extra-prodigious vell! He's sold fifty thousand copies to-day already—fifty thousand! He's beaten poor old Pickvick hollow. Von't the *Quarterly* be aggerawated?"

"I'm so glad, Charles," she said; but her voice faltered as she recalled the long hours of suspense. "I have been waiting to hear all the evening."

"I ought to have let you know earlier," he admitted, conscience-stricken. "But—well, I had to tell Talfourd and Macready, and then we went round to Maclise and Ainsworth, and decided to celebrate young Nick with a dinner. I'm afraid that, in the rush, I forgot all about poor little faithful you. You *do* understand, don't you?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"WELL, I declare!" exclaimed Kate across the breakfast-table at Doughty Street. "Here's Mr. Hall writing to *me* for personal particulars about you."

Charles looked up from his newspaper.

"He wrote to me last week," he said. "I told him that my public knows all about me. I was born with Pickwick, came of age with Oliver, and am the father of Nickleby. That ought to satisfy him."

"He says that people want to know more. Why not tell him?"

"You tell him then, Kate. Fetch a pen and paper; I'll dictate what to say and you can send it on to him. Ready?—'My husband was born at Portsmouth on the seventh of February, eighteen-twelve, so that he is only twenty-seven years old this month.'—Got that?—'He was taken to Chatham at an early age and educated there until his thirteenth year, after which'—after which, yes,—'after which he had a distinguished career at a school near London. He then entered a solicitor's office, but the Law did not attract him.'"

"'Did not attract him,' " repeated Kate, writing. "Yes?"

"'He qualified as a Parliamentary reporter,' " Charles continued, "'and was engaged in this capacity, when he was eighteen, by the *Mirror of Parliament* and acknowledged to be by far the most proficient shorthand-writer in the Gallery. His talents attracted the attention of the proprietor of the *Morning Chronicle*, to which newspaper he later gave his services for substantial remuneration, till the extraordinary success of *Pickwick* made him devote himself wholly to authorship and editing. As for myself, I am——'"

"Nobody wants to know about me, Charles."

"As my wife, my dear, every one will want to know about

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you.—‘As for myself, I am the eldest daughter of Mr. George Hogarth, the eminent critic and musical biographer, a Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh and one of the most intimate friends of the late Sir Walter Scott.’—There! Copy that out and send it off to Hall, with my curses.”

“You’ve said nothing of your own father, Charles.”

“Why should I?”

“You mention mine.”

“Oh, very well.—‘My husband’s father occupied a responsible position in the Naval Pay Office.’—That’s enough.”

“Oughtn’t you to say that you belong to an old Staffordshire family at—what’s the name of the place which you visited with Mr. Browne two months ago?”

“No, no, no,” cried Charles. “There’s no need to say any more. Just do as I ask you!”

“Why are you so upset, dear? One would think you had something to conceal.” Kate, a candid woman, was puzzled, not for the first time, by her husband’s unaccountable reluctance to discuss his childhood and parentage.

“Rubbish! Hall’s damnable curiosity annoys me. First he pesters me, then you; before we know where we are, he’ll be asking father questions. And that reminds me. I’ve decided to find my parents a pretty little cottage in the country, where they’ll be ever so much happier than in London.”

“In the country? Are you sure they want to live out of town?”

“Father’s over fifty. Look how tired he got, when he helped me with the Grimaldi book! Now that he’s dropped newspaper work, he’ll be far better in the country.”

Kate eyed her husband doubtfully.

“Have you spoken to him and your mother?” she asked.

“I thought I’d find the cottage first, but perhaps it would be as well if you called on them.”

“I’m half afraid to go near them, since you caricatured your mother as Mrs. Nickleby.”

He frowned, and she knew that she had displeased him. He could not deny that he had given Mrs. Nickleby some of

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his mother's traits, in a cruel and distorted form, but he wished that Kate would not blurt this out so frankly.

John received complacently his daughter-in-law's news of his approaching exile.

"It will give me pleasure," he said, "to beat my quill into a plowshare. I confess that I am more fitted for the intellectual side of country life—foretelling the weather, for example, and listening to the nightingale, if in season—than for its laborious aspects. Nevertheless, given an adequate staff of assistants, I feel confident of my ability to make farming pay, to say nothing of the delights of early rising. Do you not, my dear Elizabeth, look forward pleasurable to meeting philosophic shepherds and jolly millers?"

"Stuff!" replied Mrs. Dickens. "Have you any notion, Kate, why Charles wishes to maroon us in the country, like musqueteers?"

"I know that he is thinking only of your happiness," she stammered.

Her mother-in-law sniffed.

"He needn't think that I object to leaving London," she said, "for it's in my nature to be contented anywhere. I'm not like that ridiculous Mrs. Nickleby he writes about; though I'm positive that such a prancing weathercock of a woman never existed and never could exist.—Pray, John, why do you smile?"

"Did I smile, my own?" said John innocently and retired from the room.

"The country air will be good for the children," Kate suggested, to draw the conversation on safer ground.

"Let us hope that it will make us all pantehnicons of health," said Mrs. Dickens, "and that after a month or two I shall look as young and blooming as you, my dear, though nobody would believe me a grandmother. All the same, I can't help thinking that Charles has some private reason for his proposal. Why does he want us out of London? Is he ashamed of his father?"

Kate fenced. "How unlike you to suggest such a thing!" she said.

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"I know Charles better than you do, my dear," insisted Mrs. Dickens, "better perhaps than he knows himself. There's something behind this. His father's pension, I admit, is insufficient to support me and the children as we are accustomed, but the fault, I assure you, is not John's. He has always been the most considerate of husbands and more than once, in our earlier married years, he deliberately refrained from throwing himself under a cab, after making every preparation, because he knew that I was in a certain condition and he did not wish the child to be deprived of a father's love and protection. Well, as I was saying, since we are compelled to accept Charles' addition to my husband's pension, we must accept his terms also."

Kate tried vainly to convince Mrs. Dickens that no ulterior motive prompted Charles' suggestion and, on her return, she entreated him to see his mother and finally dispel her suspicions.

"Why should I?" he asked. "It's perfectly true that father is a nuisance."

"Charles!"

"You don't know half his goings-on. He 'borrows' money from my acquaintances on the strength of being my father; every month new bills arrive for me to meet on his behalf. I've given him fair warning, and I can bear it no longer."

"But think how your mother loves London!"

"And why? Because she wants to pretend to be young and skittish. She wears caps suitable for a woman half her age, and makes herself ridiculous by dancing. She laces herself so tight that she can scarcely breathe. The sooner they both go to the country, the better."

"Where do you intend to send them?" Kate asked.

"I've heard of some capital cottages in Devonshire. We'll go and look 'em over next week."

They went to Exeter. Charles saw a cottage at Alphington, a mile outside the town, took an immediate fancy to it, called on the landlady, arranged to rent it, summoned workmen, stood over them while they worked, bought furniture and coal and garden tools, and sent for his parents.

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Within a fortnight of his departure from London, John and Mrs. Dickens and their younger children, bewildered by his cyclonic energy, were settled into the cottage.

For his own family he took a cottage at Petersham, near Richmond. Kate was pregnant for the third time in three years, and the noise and heat of London oppressed her.

During the summer she passed placid, happy months, watching her two babies grow, and sewing for the one who was to join them. Charley was a sturdy boy, who toddled round the garden and delighted his father by his baby talk. Mary—Mamie, as she had come to be called—had not yet begun to talk, but she was learning to walk, and every guest was expected to join in admiration of the youngsters.

For the first time since he could remember, he was not overworked. He had celebrated the conclusion of *Oliver Twist* by handing over the editorship of the *Miscellany* to Ainsworth; now he had only to write his monthly parts of *Nickleby*, and bask in the applause which the whole reading world seemed anxious to bestow on him. He felt deliciously free and deliciously famous. He loved the sunny days at the cottage, with the mornings spent in writing, and playing with the children, the afternoons in twenty-mile tramps through the country, and the evenings in hilarious supper-parties.

His sisters spent part of the summer at the cottage with their husbands. Fanny had recently married her old admirer, Harry Burnett, the musician; Letitia's husband was a sanitary engineer named Henry Austin. Fred, Charles' brother, had lived with him since his parents' departure to Devonshire; he was a handsome lively fellow of nineteen, already several inches taller than Charles and closely resembling him, except for a snub nose and a comical air of languor. All these relatives treated Charles with deference, and provided him with the nucleus of an audience.

Mitton, his discreet solicitor, arrived for week-ends. Forster, Talfourd, Maclise and Ainsworth were constant visitors. Browne, the artist, was invited once, but Charles found his tongue-tied shyness a bore, and decided to meet him only on business.

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New acquaintances, whom he had met during the previous winter or on flying visits to town, gathered round him. Men, too, of an older literary generation, who had regarded *Pickwick* as low and *Oliver Twist* as a flash in the pan, were convinced by *Nickleby* that Charles was indeed the genius whom Forster declared him to be, and were curious to see him.

Sydney Smith, for example, came to Petersham. Charles watched with satisfaction the arrival of the witty parson, whose paunchy figure, beaked nose and twisted mouth gave him the appearance of a relic of the skeptical eighteenth century strayed into its idealistic successor.

"Welcome to King Boz's court!" Charles cried.

"You are his Fool, I presume," murmured the visitor.

Leigh Hunt, the poet, brought to the cottage his rambling reminiscences of Shelley, Byron and Keats, and his own childish affectation of unworldliness. He was petulant and tiresome when out of humor, but at Petersham he expanded in the warmth of his host's humor and energy.

When literary conversation wearied Charles, he organized sports in the meadow behind the cottage. Even Forster, whose frock-coated dignity was ill suited to such relaxations, was compelled to join the others at bowls, quoits, and battle-dore and shuttlecock. Charles and his brother took parties to the local races, where Fred concentrated on the horses and Charles wandered among the crowd in search of humorous types.

On one of his frequent short trips to London, he read his new farce, *The Lamplighter*, to Bartley, the Covent Garden manager. This was the man from whom Charles had once begged a trial as an actor, though he had been prevented from obtaining it by a swollen cheek.

"You should have seen the old boy's face, Fanny, while I was reading to him," he confided to his sister on his return to Petersham. "When he wasn't laughing at my jokes, he stared me up and down with the most puzzled expression, wondering if he'd seen me before."

"Do you think he recognized you, Charles?" asked Fanny.

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"Not he!"

"Providence sent you that swollen cheek. You were destined for a higher vocation than acting."

"You believe that, Fanny?"

"Would I speak idly of such things? Your books inspire and comfort thousands."

"I'm certain of that," he said.

"Oh, Charles, if only I could persuade you to use your talent for Christian ends, and write openly of Bible truth."

"I write of the truth as I see it," he replied, turning abruptly away.

Summer came to an end. He searched for a London home more worthy of his growing fame and family than Doughty Street. He found it in a large house in Devonshire Terrace, near Regent's Park, and arranged to move there after Kate's confinement.

She bore him a second daughter at Doughty Street in October, and insisted that, this time, the baby should be named Catherine.

When she was well again, the move was accomplished, and Charles spent his first days at Devonshire Terrace proudly arranging his new study. To grace its walls he bought a considerable library; Hogarth's words had rankled, and he made Forster choose several hundred standard books for him.

One afternoon the two friends were placing the last volumes in the bookcases, when Kate came to call them to tea.

"Forster and I have a New Year's surprise for you, Kate," cried Charles.

"I may say that we have two surprises," said Forster. "The Inimitable has embarked upon two new enterprises."

"First of all," said Charles proudly, "I'm going to be a slap-up genuwine lawyer. I've become a member of the Middle Temple."

"But I thought you disliked the Law, Charles," said Kate in surprise.

"Vell, p'r'aps I does and, likewise, p'r'aps I doesn't. Anyhow, here's surprise number two! Forster's handled Hall

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like a master. He's made that wicious wampire stump up fifteen hundred pounds extry for *Nickleby* as a peace-offering. Vot's more, Hall's bought the copyright of *Oliver*—from old Bentley, you know; and I can write *Barnaby Rudge* for him any time in the next five years. He'll pay me another thousand for that, and the copyright'll revert to me six months after it's published. How's that for good business?"

"Pretty satisfactory, I think, Mrs. Dickens?" said Forster complacently.

"And now vee comes to the real surprise. The Sparkler has werry kindly consented to seat himself vunce more in an editor's chair. Hall's to start a magazine to contain *my* stories, *my* ideas, *my* everything!"

"A monthly magazine?" she asked.

"No, a red-hot-up-to-the-minute-brilliant-amusing-keep-you-out-of-bed-late-at-night-weekly. Hall's to pay me fifty pounds a week certain for this, and a half-share in the profits as well."

"Won't it tie you dreadfully?" said Kate. "You know how you disliked editing the *Miscellany*."

"The Sparkler's assistants will have to do the routine work. Forster's arranged everything."

"What are you going to call it?"

"Charles has conceived the notion," said Forster, "of a whimsical old gentleman as a central figure, to introduce the stories and to be a mouthpiece for his editor's views."

"And he has a clock," cried Charles.

"A clock?"

"Yes, my love, a grandfather, great-great-tremendously-great-grandfather clock, in which he finds the manuscripts of stories."

"I have made the suggestion that the magazine should be entitled, *Old Humphrey's Clock*," said Forster.

"Or *Master Humphrey's Clock*. Which do you prefer, Kate?"

"I think *Master Humphrey's Clock* is better," she replied.

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"I told you so, Forster," cried Charles. "*Master Humphrey's Clock* it shall be!"

Browne and another artist, George Cattermole, who had married a distant cousin of Charles, were enlisted to illustrate the new magazine, Charles warning them to keep the idea secret, lest a dozen rival "Clocks" were prematurely planted on the bookstalls. The more his reputation and sales grew, the more he suffered from literary pirates, who published close imitations of his novels and had not even scrupled to issue spurious endings to *Nickleby* while it was still in progress.

A more serious grievance was the publication of pirated editions of his books in the United States. His stories sold here by tens of thousands, without his receiving a single penny for them.

When he complained of this to Talfourd, the lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"What can I do?" he said. "You've no legal remedy against the Americans."

"But it's damnable!" exclaimed Charles. "It's downright theft! You know that no one cares for money less than I do. I am not speaking in any sordid sense of American piracy. It's the injustice which infuriates me, and I'm the worst sufferer in the world by it to-day."

"The only man who can alter matters is yourself," said Talfourd. "You're the darling of the Americans. Why don't you go over there, and appeal to them in your proper person to change their unjust copyright laws?"

"How can I cross the Atlantic now, my dear friend, with a new magazine on my hands?"

"Go later on!" Talfourd suggested.

"Maybe I shall," Charles said, and stored the suggestion in his mind.

He devoted himself, meanwhile, to completing the preliminary arrangements for the *Clock* in time to pay a visit with Kate to Walter Savage Landor at Bath. Forster took them down, and the party was completed by Maclise, whose traveling garb—a braided frock coat, bottle-green waistcoat, puce

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trousers and white hat—set his companions in a roar of laughter.

Kate was delighted with her host's gentle courtesy.

"I knew your father well, when he was a young man in Edinburgh," was his greeting, as he bowed over her hand. "I am honored to welcoom any child of his to my house."

Though they remained at Bath only three days, this was too long for Charles, who was piqued not to be the central figure. Landor admired his guest's work, but his talk turned on his own interests—his friendships with Pitt and Scott, his travels in Italy, his quarrels with Byron, his compositions in prose and verse. He found Forster a more sympathetic listener than Charles, who, after fruitless attempts to dominate the conversation, drooped into offended silence.

"I was right about Ba-ath," he told Kate in their room on the last night of the visit. "I told you that it was a snobbish flunkeys-in-livery-master-of-ceremonies-pray-present-me-to-the-duchess den of humbugs, and so it is. Landor's caught the infection of it."

"I think he's an old dear," she said, a little resentfully.

"I think he's an old bore," he mimicked her. "I can't endure the way he booms about his 'woonderful' pictures, and recites that 'woonderful' Latin verse of his. He's fifty years behind the times, and it's high time he knew it."

"He was young enough this afternoon, Charles, when you were out of the room. I'm surprised that you didn't hear him quarreling with Mr. Forster about a Greek accent. He suddenly flew into a passion; so did Mr. Forster, and they both forgot about me and shouted themselves hoarse."

"I had more important things on my mind," he said. "I've a notion for a short story for the *Clock*. What do you think of *Little Nell* for a name?"

With a smothered sigh she lapsed into her rôle of audience to his projects and ambitions. "A name for whom?"

"Little Nell, Kate, is a young and innocent girl who is brought up by a gambling grandfather, and tries to save him from himself.—Oh, you just wait till I get her started! I have never felt so inspired."

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"I'm glad the journey has done you good, dear."

"I'll do Landor good, too, before I've finished with him. The Sparkler's going to liven the old bear up, so that he won't know if he's on his head or his heels."

"Don't be unkind to him, Charles!"

He may have heeded her plea, for he did no worse than play a hoax on Landor.

Queen Victoria had just married Prince Albert, and Charles, returning to London, wrote Landor a mock confession of his passion for the young queen. He declared that, having lost her to the prince, he could solace his grief only by abducting one of her maids of honor. Forster and Maclise, he said, were ready to help him. Would Landor join them?

The old poet was bewildered by this waggery, which Charles elaborated until Kate wearied of the very sound of the queen's name. She thought it a feeble joke at the best and marveled at her husband's joy in it, but concluded that, being a woman, she had no sense of humor.

Fortunately, the imminent publication of the *Clock*, and an experience on a coroner's jury gave him new topics of conversation.

The inquest was on a child, supposed to have been strangled by its mother. The woman's protestations of innocence touched Charles' heart; and he boasted to Kate that he had persuaded the other jurors to find her guilty only of concealing the birth, and was arranging for her to be cared for while she was in custody.

"The Coroner himself told me afterward that I was right, and that, as a doctor, he could prove that the child hadn't been strangled."

"Then surely he wouldn't have let the jury return a verdict of murder?" Kate said.

"That's nothing whatever to do with it!" he answered tartly.

The first number of the *Clock* appeared, and, to his glee, seventy thousand copies were sold. Its readers, however, were disappointed to find no serial story, and the sale of the

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second number was much smaller. In the third Charles re-introduced Mr. Pickwick and the Wellers; but they were not enough, and he decided to elaborate the story of Little Nell into a long serial novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

This plan was so successful that the first design of the magazine was dropped; the novel ousted every other feature till the title alone remained. Master Humphrey appeared again for a moment at the end of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, but only to introduce its successor, *Barnaby Rudge*, the Gordon Riots story, which now at last Charles began to write.

During the summer Kate found that she was once again to become a mother. Her husband received the news with a jest, as if habituated to the almost annual increase in his family.

His work kept him too busy to perceive that Kate was losing her youth and her freshness. She was no longer the Kate who had allured his boyish fancy. She had become silent, withdrawn, saddened. He noticed, certainly, how often she now stumbled and bruised herself, especially when he indulged his fad of rearranging the furniture; but it never occurred to him, when he laughed at her, that her weakness was due to the recurrent strain of maternity.

She bore her fourth child and second son, Walter, early in February. When the domestic upheaval forced Charles one afternoon to dine with Forster in the study, he could endure it no longer.

Stifling his recollection of Kate's unhappiness at his absence after Mamie's birth, he fled to the tranquil comfort of a Brighton hotel.

Little Nell won him the greatest compliment he had yet received. Lord Jeffrey, the most powerful and usually the harshest Scottish critic, wrote to him that no character so lovable had been painted since Shakespeare's Cordelia. That Jeffrey applauded his genius and ranked him with Shakespeare made Charles indifferent to any hostile notice of his work.

He spread the good news among his friends, and especially at Gore House, where Forster had introduced him.

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Gore House satisfied his taste for the fashionable and the singular. Every evening during the London season Lady Blessington presided there over the wits, men of letters, politicians and artists of the day, receiving her guests in a magnificent State armchair, which had been made for a King of France.

Though at fifty she retained few traces of her beauty, she was exquisitely gowned and jeweled, and her drawing-room reflected her character. It was ornate, paneled with mirrors and furnished with a strange haphazard collection of precious things—a fit setting for the throng which frequented it.

A few, a very few broad-minded women called on her in the afternoons; but in the evenings she had no rivals to distract attention from herself. This was because gossip had for many years joined her name with Count D'Orsay. He had, until recently, maintained a modest establishment of his own, but now fear of arrest for debt drove him to take refuge in Gore House and its gardens. This graceful, middle-aged French dandy won Charles' half-contemptuous affection; he was so gay as he played host for his mistress, so amusing with his chatter, so proud of his sketches, so naively hopeful of paying his colossal debts by discovering the Philosopher's Stone and transmuting lead to gold.

No warm-hearted man could resist him, Charles told Forster, as he capped D'Orsay's delicate wit with his own downright humor.

Lady Blessington offered Charles the admiration which he loved.

"You are one of the few men who enable me to keep at bay the mildew of the soul," she told him, and he swallowed the grotesque tribute.

He delighted to meet there on equal terms the public men whom, formerly, he had envied from the obscurity of the Gallery and the reporters' table. Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister, whom he had always regarded as a crafty schemer, proved to be a charming and inconsequent cynic. Charles affected to scorn him as an anachronism, but, when the old

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man drifted pleasantly through Lady Blessington's salon after a busy day of playing fairy godfather to the queen, Charles was at pains to be respectfully agreeable.

Samuel Rogers, the ancient banker-poet, with his death's-head features and phosphorescent wit, chatted to "my dear Boz" in short precise sentences. Carlyle, a gaunt untidy Scot, paid him gruff compliments, his wistful eyes roaming over a scene which in his writings he would have bewailed as degenerate.

But Charles had no liking for the two Disraelis—Isaac the father, a recondite old Jew, beaming through gold spectacles; Benjamin the son, ringleted and perfumed, with sprawling flowers embroidered on his waistcoat, and heavy rings outside his white kid gloves. Charles dismissed the one as a pedant, and despised the other as a coxcomb who presumed to imagine himself a novelist.

Charles pressed his wife to call on Lady Blessington in the afternoon, but Kate, aware of the open scandal of her association with D'Orsay, obstinately refused to visit Gore House.

She was incredulous when, after one of these discussions, he told her that he intended to take Charley there one afternoon. He persisted in his intention, and displayed the precocious little boy to the bored but polite gaze of D'Orsay and his mistress, as "a chip off the old block, vot takes arter his father, he does."

He could not understand Kate's attitude toward Gore House. Here was he, being received in Society, even meeting the Prime Minister, and she would not share his triumph!

Grimly he remembered how once—only six years ago—he had envied the Hogarths and congratulated himself on the prospect of marrying into their circle. To-day he had risen far above them.

And Kate would not follow him.—Or was it that she could not?

He never dreamed that he had ceased to be the charming, attentive companion whom Kate would gladly have followed. Intoxicated with his own sudden rise he forgot that she

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had, from childhood, been used to meeting distinguished men and women, and could take her place in any society.

She still grasped every opportunity to restore him to his old place in her imagination.

"What was Mr. Forster talking about so enthusiastically after dinner?" she asked him one day. "He told me, as he left, that you were the kindest-hearted man in the world."

"Yes, I've promised to edit a collection of stories for the benefit of Macrone's widow."

"What? Is Mr. Macrone dead?"

"The old fox is dead, my dear, and, just as I expected from such a humbug, he's left his cubs unprovided. Forster put it to me that it'd be a manly act if I overlooked the wrong Macrone did me, and returned good for evil."

"It is noble of you, Charles."

"And what's more, I'm contributing a story to the collection myself. I'm turning my farce, *The Lamplighter*, into a tale. It won't take me more than a day or two."

Kate saw an opportunity to suggest another, and more private, channel for her husband's generosity.

"Your father is in London," she said.

"I suspected it. He's started to draw bills on me again. Has he asked you for money?"

"I'm afraid he has. At least, he came and borrowed five pounds from me."

"Borrowed! My dear Kate, why must you be so extravagant? I find him a home in the country; he takes advantage of it to come to London and sponge on you. So long as you're foolish enough to give way, we'll never be rid of him."

"I know it's provoking, dear, but it isn't much."

"It amounts to this—that he must do as I tell him. I've set him up in a cottage, and he has his pension. If he can't behave properly, I wash my hands of him. I'll write to him to-day that this is the last straw."

John was unlucky enough to call again at Devonshire Terrace that evening. His son upbraided him, cut short his protestations and packed him off, badly scared, to the country.

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On Charles' instruction, Mitton drafted an advertisement that "certain persons having or purporting to have the surname of our client, have put into circulation, with the view of more readily obtaining credit thereon, certain acceptances made payable at his private residence or at the offices of his business agents," adding that no one had the right to draw promissory notes in Charles' name, and that these would not be met.

"How cruel of you, Charles," said Kate indignantly, when at breakfast he handed her a newspaper containing the notice. "This will break your father's heart."

"Better so, than that he should break my pocket."

"A few pounds now and then mean nothing to you, with your magnificent arrangement with Mr. Hall."

"I will not permit father to trade on my name. I've told Mitton to send him a copy of the newspaper, with a stiff letter."

"I do think you might bear with your own father."

He jumped to his feet, furious.

"I lose patience with you," he cried. "Tell me that blood is thicker than water; denounce me as an inhuman monster, an undutiful son! Haven't I come down handsome for my parents? Haven't I just given one of my brothers his fare to New Zealand? Don't I support nearly all my relations, as well as you and my children?"

"*Our* children," Kate quietly corrected him.

A dim sense of guilt combined with his intolerance of criticism to swell his rage.

"Yes, *our* children," he stormed. "I wonder you don't think more often of them. Whom else do you imagine I slave for? Whom else do you think I'm trying to make money for? You've no idea of the value of money. I've earned every penny I ever had in my life; and you only know how to spend it. Look at this month's bills! Till you learn to curb your extravagance, Kate, I'll ask you not to interfere between me and my father."

He slammed the door behind him, leaving her aghast and puzzled.

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Why was he so inconsistent? He bewailed the size of the household bills, but it was he who insisted on living in a large house, on feasting his friends and admirers, on showering costly presents on them. He would hear of no economy where he himself was concerned. He gave silver to every beggar, but flew into a rage at the not very considerable demands of his absurd, lovable father.

She did not realize that his moods of parsimony and of extravagance were both legacies from the straitened childhood of which he kept her in ignorance. The terrifying specter of want stood always at his elbow; but, at the same time, thoughts of former deprivations drove him to gratify his every whim and command every luxury which money could buy.

She was hurt also by the tone in which he had reproached her. That he should rule the home was his right, and she did not question it. But now he was becoming dictatorial. He insisted that the household should comply with his every humor. When he was gay, every one must echo his gaiety, and he summoned her and the children—the latter each by a particular howl—to join in his frolics. When he was at work, no matter at what hour, he demanded a silent house. If the children did not respond to his mood, he blamed her for lacking control over them.

All his visitors were subjected to the same tyranny. His brothers and sisters were too proud of him, some of them too dependent on his charity, to challenge it; and most of his friends indulged his failings as the amiable eccentricities of genius. Kate had noticed that such as did not accept his dominion were banished from his favor.

CHAPTER TWELVE

HE EXCUSED his outburst, later in the morning, with the explanation that he had been perplexed by an offer from a country borough to nominate him for Parliament.

"There's something to be said for it," he told her. "If I was in Parliament, you see, I'd be able to show up cant, hypocrisy and humbug on their native heath. But I can't afford the time. Of course, if I was a rich man—but we won't go into that again. Besides, people would think that I despaired of moving the nation's conscience with my writing."

"So you won't stand?" she said.

"Believe me, Kate, you'll have no cause for disappointment. There's better things in the world than being in Parliament, as the Inimitable's wife ree-marked v'en he told her he would take her to Scotland for a holiday."

"Scotland, Charles? Oh, how sweet of you!"

She was grateful for this unexpected treat. Here was an example of his affection and thoughtfulness, just when she had been reproaching him in her heart for selfishness and neglect.

The surprised delight of her tone pleased him, and he patted the demure shoulder in its sober gray stuff-gown. She could never be persuaded to dress as gaily as he wished.

"I knew you'd be happy," he said. "Think of it! Your ain bonnie Scotland! —You see, I have to run up to Edinburgh next month; they've promised me banquets and speeches and presentations and things. You shall come with me. I'd like to know the woman who wouldn't envy you. Afterward, we'll slip away together and see the Highlands!"

The holiday was all that he promised. He was received with acclamation by the worthies of Edinburgh, and her

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father's friends congratulated Kate on being the wife of the most famous young man in Britain.

They toured the country, Charles marveling at the scenery and laughing at the rough roads, the bad inns and the deplorable weather. His unwonted tenderness recompensed her for the exhaustion of long walks and the bruises which she sustained on the mountainsides.

It was a second honeymoon, and she lived every moment of it greedily, for she knew that it could not last.

Back in London, as she had feared, Charles relapsed into moodiness. He was nearing the end of *Barnaby Rudge* and groaned once more under the restraints of serial publication. He began to worry about the necessity of following up *Barnaby* with another novel; was he never to have a respite from creation?

Kate had foreseen this difficulty, and welcomed a visit from Forster, to whose broad shoulders Charles transferred his troubles, before taking his family to Broadstairs, a small Kentish watering place.

Forster called on Hall to point out that, if Charles was to continue earning money for his publishers, he must be humored. Since *Master Humphrey's Clock* had degenerated into a mere binding for his novels, it could well cease at the end of *Barnaby Rudge*. Charles, he explained, was exhausted by the strain of writing, and needed a year's holiday to restore his powers. Then he would be willing to provide Chapman and Hall with another novel—on terms.

"Hall writhed in agony," Forster told the expectant author at Broadstairs next day. "So you can imagine that the terms which I proposed are indeed excellent."

"That man's always writhing. What are they?"

Forster took a paper from his pocket.

"For a year," he announced, "you need do nothing. But you will receive an advance of one hundred and fifty pounds monthly from Messrs. Chapman and Hall."

"Vot ho!" shouted Charles.

"Then you will provide them with the first instalment of a new story, which is to be published in twenty monthly

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parts. For each monthly part you will receive the sum of two hundred pounds, on delivery of the manuscript."

"As well as the advance payments?"

"Most certainly. Further, you will receive three-quarters of the net profits of every issue, in so far as these exceed two hundred pounds. The twelve advance payments are to be deducted from your share of these extra profits."

"There never vos such terms!" cried Charles, clapping his friend on the back.

"That is exactly what Hall observed. He told Chapman that they might as well put up their shutters at once."

"And what did Chapman say?"

"He laughed and told Hall to be grateful that I had not demanded all the profits."

"I always knew Chapman was a manly fellow. Hall's a weakling, physically and morally. Oh, vot a werry reemarkable cove you are, my Jungle Joy! You couldn't give Dodson and Fogg points in conductin' of negoshiwayshuns, could you? Oh, dear, no. Certainly not!"

"The credit is all yours, my dear friend," said Forster, rosy with gratification. "Whatever I have been able to effect, is entirely the result of your genius. By the way, Hall desires to insert a clause, which will be operative only if the book should happen not to succeed."

"That's the authentic Hall-mark! As if, after *Barnaby*, any novel of mine could fail!"

"Precisely. But, in the incredible event of the book's failure, Hall reserves the right to reduce your monthly check to one hundred and fifty pounds. I thought that it was only politic to defer to him on this point, especially as——"

"Especially as it can't make a ha'p'orth o' difference. I get you, my Howdah-do!"

"It is amazing how you read my thoughts, Charles. That is exactly why I did not care to stand out. My anxiety is directed to an altogether different matter: Are you to be trusted with twelve months' leisure and a new check-book?"

"Oh, I'll work, my financial Fagin, never fear! Trust the Sparkler!"

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During the rest of his stay at Broadstairs Charles luxuriated in thoughts of his coming liberty. As soon as he finished his weekly instalment of *Barnaby*, he rode, walked, bathed, read, played with the children and basked in the sun.

As he lay one afternoon on the sands, lazily watching Charley and Mamie build a castle, he startled Kate with the remark, "In January we go to America."

She affected not to hear; but he saw her start, and repeated his words in a louder tone.

"Of course, we won't," Kate said, attempting to laugh away her misgiving.

"Of course, we will."

Glancing at him doubtfully, she saw that he was serious, and there was a hint of acerbity in her reply.

"You go, if you must," she said. "You often go away without me."

"I insist that you come with me. A visit to America is the dream of my life. I'm sick of fine old British humbug. I want to see the country of the freest people on the earth, to tread the soil where true democracy has been established. Everybody there has heard of me. They'll be amazed if you're not with me.—Besides, the change will do you good."

"But I must stay and look after the children."

"We'll take 'em with us."

"But, Charles, how could we? The crossing would kill them. Mr. Macready has told me how dreadful it is."

"Very well, then; they shall stay behind."

"You are heartless to want to separate me from them! I couldn't leave them."

"You don't seem to mind the prospect of leaving me."

"It isn't that, darling; it isn't that at all. I must think of the children. We can't take them with us, and I don't think it would be right for me to leave them."

"I won't argue with you, Kate. I'm going, and you're going with me." His tone was aggrieved as he added, "And I meant it as a wonderful surprise for you!"

To his dismay she maintained her resistance. Charles made her and himself miserable by his importunity, till she

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shuddered at the mention of America. Every time that she wept at the thought of being separated from the children, he was amazed at her obtuseness; could she not realize that parting from them would be just as painful for him?

They returned to London, still at loggerheads.

Forster arrived one evening to find Charles gesticulating in speechless rage, and Kate in tears.

"You have behaved like a clumsy fool, Charles," he said bluntly, when she left them. "Don't tell me! Why, even a confirmed bachelor like myself could not have been more heavy-handed."

"See if you can drive reason into her stubborn head," Charles rejoined.

At supper Kate reappeared, red-eyed and pale, and, after a silent meal, Forster made an opportunity to talk with her alone.

"Let us be calm and reasonable, my dear Mrs. Dickens," he said, patting her hand like a nurse with a fretful child. "Let us try to find a way round our troubles."

"How can I leave my babies, Mr. Forster?" replied Kate. "It's so cruel to suggest it!"

"Not cruel. Charles is incapable of cruelty; we know that he is the very soul of kindness. Try to look at things from his point of view! He can not bear the thought of separation from you."

"Yes, but the children?"

"Suppose I were to find some one who would mother them while you were away? You will not be gone for many months."

"I shouldn't pass an easy moment, Mr. Forster, lest something happened to them."

"But consider your duty to your husband—and to yourself! Surely you desire to share the triumph which awaits him across the Atlantic? Your pride too must tell you that you should not let him go alone." He paused significantly. "Charles is young, attractive, charming——"

"How can you suggest such things?" cried Kate, flushing with anger.

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She rose and walked across the room, away from him. Forster feigned humility.

"Forgive me, dear lady, forgive me," he murmured. "You mistook my meaning."

Before he left the house, he put his head round the door of Charles' study. "I think you will find everything as you wish," he said with a satisfied smile.

The seed of jealousy which he had planted in Kate's mind grew amazingly. She sat pondering, her needlework untouched on her lap.

Never before had she imagined that another woman could enter Charles' life. Now she began to question, to probe, to examine. She had grown resigned to playing a second part in his life. His work came first. But—share him with another woman?

She wondered if his affection was really stable. Did he still love her? He had become so restless lately; he seemed to avoid being alone with her. Any excuse was sufficient to send him off to a dinner with friends, to Gore House, to a country ramble with Forster. If his work tied him to the house where she was, whether at Broadstairs or in London, he filled it with visitors. Memories of incident after incident forced upon her the realization that Charles was slipping away from her. She could no longer sway him, or predict his lightest decision.

He had not always been like this. She remembered the eager, lovable boy on whom her father had taken pity, his attempts to conceal his gaucherie with spurts of nervous talk, his almost pathetic longing for affection, his proud delight when she accepted his halting proposal. She remembered his exultation when Hall's offer permitted him to make her his wife, the delicious madness of the honeymoon in the Kentish cottage, the first joyful year of marriage in the quaint beloved rooms in Furnival's Inn and in the cozy house in Doughty Street.

How happy they had been together, Charles and she and Mary!

Mary? A monstrous doubt stabbed her. *Mary?* She

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tried to repel it, to shut the doors of her mind upon it; but it forced its way into her thoughts.

Had Charles loved Mary, though unconsciously, with a more than brotherly love, with a love akin to that which he felt for his wife? Perhaps he had loved Mary more than her? Why else had he insisted on naming his first daughter after her? Why had he dreamed of her, night after night? Why did he wear her ring, cherish the braid of her hair, claim her as the inspiration of his favorite heroine, Little Nell? Why did he still weep, after five long years, whenever he spoke of her death?

It must be so. He had always loved Mary. And he still loved her, more than he could love any other woman, more than he loved his wife!

With a flash of insight, Kate realized that this was his nature. Whomever he married, he would despise—*just because he had married her*. He had married Kate; therefore he idealized Mary. If he could have married Mary, he would have idealized Kate.

Charles was like that, ever restless for the unattainable, ever surfeited with what he possessed. She felt a pang of pity for him. Poor bewildered Charles, unable to comprehend the passion that was eating away his heart!

Only afterward did she begin to pity herself, that she must share her husband—as she had always shared him—with a rival who grew ever more adorable, because the impassable barrier of death stood between them.

She took up her needle again and worked a few stitches. Then she mounted unsteadily to their bedroom.

She was confirmed in her discovery a few days later. One of her brothers died, and her parents decided that he should be buried in the grave next to Mary's. When Kate mentioned this to Charles, he blanched.

"No, no, no," he cried. "It's out of the question. He mustn't be buried there!"

"Why not, dear?" she asked. "It's all arranged."

"I tell you it's impossible. This grave must not be filled. I—I intend to be buried there myself, when my time comes."

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"Charles! What do you mean?"

"I mean that, when I die, I am determined to rest as near Mary in the earth, as I was near her at the hour of her death."

"Surely you intend to be buried beside your own family, or beside me?—Please don't speak any more about it; you frighten me."

He was weeping now, and his words were broken with sobs. "Her coffin—Mary's coffin must be dug up—taken away—to some other place. Where I can find a resting-place beside her. They mustn't bury him next to Mary! I forbid it. They mustn't!"

She hurried to consult her parents. Mrs. Hogarth, shocked by his grim proposal, sent her back with a letter, beseeching him to abandon it.

Kate found him calmer, but shivering with fever.

"Very well," he said, when he read her mother's entreaty, "they may do what they please. But you can't know, Kate, what it means to me, to give up this grave. It's like losing dear, dear Mary a second time."

The emotional strain of the renunciation made him ill. He lay in bed for a week and, when he recovered, the American journey obsessed him, as if he longed to lose sight, though only for a while, of surroundings in which he was never safe from reminders of Mary's death.

"So you're going to America at last, are you?" said Talfourd, the lawyer, when he heard the news. "I thought you would."

"I've always wished to greet that young and manly democracy, and now's my chance. If it's half the country I think it is, I may decide to settle down there permanently."

"Anyhow, see what you can do about the copyright scandal!"

"Leave that to me, my dear Talfourd. I'll hang the pirates at their own yard-arm—see if I don't!—and lay every English author under an eternal debt to me."

Forster, eager to humor him, found a solution to every difficulty, and an answer to each of Kate's arguments.

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He arranged that Catherine Macready, the actor's wife, should care for the babies in their parents' absence; and Kate had to admit that no better foster-mother could be found. He inspired Maclise to make a drawing of the children, so that Kate and Charles would have the image of their darlings ever before them. He made her objections to the journey seem utterly selfish; and, at last, very sadly, she reconciled herself to it.

Charles' delight was her reward. He caught her in his arms, declaring that no better wife and mother existed, and carried her off to buy new gowns, stiff with silk and embroidery, lace and ribbons. It was long since she had known him so affectionate; and this nerved her for the parting. She hugged the four bewildered children, kissed them, hid her tears and tried to smile when, in Forster's company, she and Charles and Anne, her maid, set out for Liverpool.

He was as excited as a schoolboy. He teased Kate and her maid, poked fun at Forster, and joked incessantly from the moment they left London till, in the thin January sunshine, they came in sight of their vessel, the *Britannia*.

Charles whistled with astonishment. She was by far the largest steamer that he had ever seen. He questioned the porter from the Adelphi Hotel, who guided them, and passed on his information to the others.

"She's over eleven hundred tons register," he said, "and the first steamship in reg'lar service between England and America. What's more, she's been making the passage in under three weeks ever since her maiden voyage eighteen months ago."

"She is a wonderful example of the applications of modern science," Forster said.

"Don't I wish you was going with us, my Nabob!—I mean, your weight'd stop her rolling in the dirtiest weather."

Except for her tall, red, black-topped funnel and her great paddle-boxes, the *Britannia* looked much like any ocean-going sailer of the time. The long wooden hull, the three lofty masts, the spars and rigging, the flat stern, the square, painted port-holes—all conformed to sailing-ship design.

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Indeed, she rarely steamed without her sails set to help her when the wind was favorable and to steady her in rough weather.

They clambered on board, greeted by one of the officers. A group of passengers watched them, wrapped in ulsters and muffled against the cold, and Charles heard the grateful whisper of his name.

"Your stateroom, Mr. Dickens?" said a steward.

"Stateroom, eh?" repeated Charles, nudging his wife.

The man led them into a long, low, dismal room, through the center of which ran a table.

"The saloon," he announced.

Charles laughed at Forster's expression.

"You're thinking of the pretty picture we saw at the agent's office," he said, "with swells of high degree taking their elegant recreation. I knew we'd have a surprise."

"This way," said the steward, and they descended a companion to a dark alleyway where a smell, compounded of bilge, spice and stuffiness, assailed them.

"Your stateroom, sir," he said, throwing open a narrow door.

"Impossible! Don't tell me!" cried Forster, peering inside.

Charles looked over his shoulder into a tiny oblong box of a room, the plank walls white, cold and bare. Something like a hanging cupboard held two shelves, on each of which lay a thin mattress and a hard pillow.

"You'll take the upper bed, sir, I suppose?"

"He calls 'em beds!" Charles murmured.

A comfortless settee, a wash-stand with a minute cupboard over it, an oil-lantern on the wall, and two or three hooks, completed the furniture.

"We'll never get our bags inside," sighed Kate.

"We'll never get ourselves inside," said her husband.

"Where's the ladies' cabin, steward?"

"Just here, sir," replied the man, opening a door.

"That's lucky, anyhow, Kate," cried Charles, already recovering from his disappointment. "I can sit there with you

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during the voyage; so it don't much matter that our state-room isn't stately, let alone roomy."

At noon next day they waved farewell to Forster and prepared for departure. But they had to wait for the mails, and it was well on in the afternoon before the captain shouted a command, the siren hooted, the vessel trembled as her paddle-wheels churned the gray water and, with three loud cheers from the crew and, at Charles' suggestion, three more from the passengers, they started.

A bell called them to dinner. Kate was placed between her husband and the other most distinguished passenger, Lord Mulgrave, a tall, handsome young Guards officer, on his way, he told them, to Boston, whence he would rejoin his regiment at Montreal.

Charles glanced down the table at the other diners.

"How many do you think we are?" he asked Mulgrave.

"Eighty-six, the captain tells me, not counting the steerage, of course."

"Eighty-six! Just fancy!" said Kate. "I wonder why they're all going."

"I'll tell you just by looking at 'em, my dear," Charles broke in. "That handsome young couple opposite, who can hardly take their eyes off one another—she's a publican's daughter, and they're eloping with all the movables out of the bar-parlor and the contents of the till."

"Hush," murmured Kate. "They'll hear you."

The steward thrust a menu before him.

"What have we here, steward?" he asked.

"There's roast ribs o' beef, sir; very good. Or there's boiled leg o' mutton, with trimmings; very good."

"Not merely good, eh?" said Charles, imitating a cross-examining barrister. "Very good, you say? Be extremely careful how you reply, my friend, for the learned judge is taking particular note of every word you say!"

The steward turned impatiently away and handed the menu to Kate.

As Charles ate, his eye roamed down the table, and he commented on the other passengers to Kate and Mulgrave.

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"There's another of your Scotswomen," he said, pointing to a small, sandy-haired woman. "She talks as broad Scots as old Black of the *Chronicle*."

"I understand that she's on her way to join her husband in New York," said Mulgrave.

"There you are!" cried Charles. "What did I tell you? And that weak-faced young feller next to her, drinking champagne—he's a rich man's son, with money to burn."

"You're right again," said Mulgrave. "He's the son of a railroad-contractor, who's shipping him out of the way to Canada. The three men over there are cotton-merchants going out to Virginia; the two beyond 'em are officers stationed in Halifax——"

"You seem to know everybody, Lord Mulgrave," Kate smiled.

"The captain's a particular friend of mine, Mrs. Dickens. I've sailed with him before."

Charles recalled his wife's attention.

"Don't neglect your husband for a noble lord," he said, "or, with all these pretty women on board, your sparkling Sailor Boy may transfer his affections."

They had not the same appetite, or he the same cheerfulness, when, a few hours later, the bell called them to supper. The ship began to roll, with much creaking of her timbers and rattling of the cups and cruets in the saloon. A heavy thud and the stamp of sea-boots warned them that something had broken loose outside.

The lamps were lighted and added a smell of oil to the heavy air. Kate retired unsteadily, and Charles paced the deck in conversation with Mulgrave, smoking cigars and drinking brandy and water till close on midnight.

He found Kate moaning on a settee in the ladies' cabin, while Anne, the maid, lay on the floor, too seasick to move.

Calling the stewardess, he put Kate to bed. Before he blew out the light and climbed into his own dank berth, he roused her to watch his clothes swaying from the hooks, like corpses from a gibbet.

He woke next morning with a strange taste in his mouth,

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and gazed across the stateroom. His clothes swung out toward him, hung motionless in the air, and flapped back against the wall. He hastily closed his eyes again. The glasses rattled in the cupboard beside him; his shoes slithered across the floor, and he heard a groan from Kate in the bunk below.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, Charles, I've been so sick all night."

"I wish I could be."

For the next two days he suffered acutely. He spent his time reading in his bed, nibbling the hard biscuit and weak brandy which the stewardess brought him. He made an expedition to the deck, in the hope that the fresh air would relieve him, but soon retreated to the cabin.

Kate was prostrated. She begged the stewardess to send her maid, but Anne was too sick to come.

On the fourth morning Kate's shriek awoke her husband. The stateroom was inches deep in water, which swept their brushes and slippers across the floor as the *Britannia* wallowed and pitched. The noise was terrific. All their previous discomfort was outdone. For three days they kept their cabin, afraid every moment that they would fall out of their bunks from sheer weakness.

When the weather calmed, Charles dressed and staggered on deck, pale and woebegone. He had not shaved since he left Liverpool and hardly recognized the unkempt vision in the mirror.

After receiving the congratulations of the others in the saloon on his recovery, he ate a hearty meal, during which he learned the news of the ship, and returned to Kate.

"You're lucky not to want to eat," he said. "The cook's been swilling whisky all the voyage. He was dragged out of the galley this morning, and they played the fire-hose on him. And both the baker and the pastry-cook are too ill to work. An odd hand's been pressed into pastry-making, though he says he's bilious and the sight of dough's enough to kill him."

"Please don't talk about food, dear," she whispered.

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"It's a marvel we weathered the storm as well as we did," he continued. "Half the planks are ripped off the paddle-boxes, and the wheels smother the deck in water as they go round. One of the life-boats has been smashed to smithereens, and the rigging's hanging in festoons from the spars."

"Won't you tell me something to cheer me up?" she implored him.

"What d'you say to a little music?"

He held up an accordion. "I found the steward with this in his hands, and persuaded him to lend it to me. Listen!"

He coaxed a series of discords from the instrument.

"Do you recognize the tune?"

"*God Save the Queen?*" she hazarded.

"I thought you had a good ear," he laughed. "That was *Home, Sweet Home*. I'll play it to you again. It'll comfort you."

He played it several times.

"Do you mind if I try to go to sleep now?" she murmured.

"Very well, dear; I'll take my accordion along to the saloon, and cheer up the others. But I'll come and play to you again in the afternoon."

Kate felt a little better next day and managed to totter into the ladies' cabin. There the little Scotswoman comforted her and encouraged her to talk about the children and show the drawing which Maclise had made of them.

Charles, once more in spirits, went off to inspect the steerage passengers. They were mostly emigrants from the Highlands and Ireland, a wretched company, sick and terrified, huddled together in cramped and fetid misery. He told them who he was, and tried to hearten them by pointing out that every roll of the vessel brought them nearer to the continent of unbounded opportunities, but they seemed too far sunk to respond.

Returning to the saloon, he began a conversation with his neighbors upon the country which they were approaching.

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"Any one who knows England as I do," he said, "must rejoice that a nation has arisen, strong and free, beyond the ocean where men and women may begin a new life."

He contrasted the Old World and the New. He described the pathos and heroism of the English poor, the horrors of the Poor Law, the struggle to keep a home together, the sufferings of factory children. He lamented the ruin of Ireland, and insisted that the United States, with their democratic institutions, were draining away Europe's most vigorous blood.

The others hung on his words, except the cotton-merchants, who, after listening to him for a few minutes, moved to the far end of the saloon.

While he talked, a tall languid man, who, Mulgrave whispered, was the Halifax pilot returning from a trip to England, lounged on the edge of the table and cleaned his finger-nails with a fork.

Charles stopped for breath, and the pilot broke in.

"Rackon yew've arfen ben in the U-nited States," he drawled.

Charles took this as a compliment. "This is my first visit to America, my friend," he replied.

"Pahsible?"

"I beg your pardon," said Charles.

"I said, 'Pahsible.'"

"Oh, possible—possible what?"

"Pahsible yew don't know nuffin 'bout the U-nited States."

"The matters which I was discussing, sir," returned Charles sharply, "are known to all educated men."

"Pahsible," agreed the pilot. "But it don't follow they air so."

"That a free country, my man," said Charles severely, "must inevitably flourish at the expense of those lands where caste and privilege hold sway, is not a proposition which allows of discussion."

He turned to resume his discourse to the rest of the company.

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"I admit," he said, "that there are two features of American life which conflict with her general principles. These are slavery, which is, however, frowned upon by all enlightened men in the North; and, secondly, the unblushing piracy of English books without any benefit to the original authors. The first is a domestic matter; but I propose to speak openly about the second, by which I must avow myself the chief sufferer in the world to-day."

"An' yew rackon the Yankees ull wahry 'bout yewr suff'rins?" came the pilot's voice from behind him.

"I do, sir," said Charles, swinging impatiently round to him again. "I am not unknown in America, and I have announced my coming in the newspapers. You may rest assured that I shall receive the hearing to which my position in English literature entitles me."

He walked away to join Mulgrave, the ship's doctor, and the head engineer in a rubber of whist. The *Britannia* still rolled sufficiently to make the cards slip off the table, and they pocketed each trick as it was played.

When he reached their stateroom at midnight, Kate was reading, the picture of the children propped on the settee, so that her eye caught it whenever she glanced up from her book.

"Not asleep?" he cried.

"My face hurts dreadfully," she answered.

He saw that one cheek was flushed and swollen.

"My dear girl! Your cheek's like an orange."

"I know," she sobbed, "and it's so painful, and I feel so ill. I'm certain I'll ne-never see the darling children again."

He comforted her with soothing words. When she dried her eyes, he fetched the doctor.

"It's nothing worse than a cold in your cheek, Mrs. Dickens," he assured her. "I'll bind it up with a hot compress and give you a sleeping draught. We'll see how it is in the morning."

When the doctor left, Kate grew drowsy. Charles watched her, softly playing his accordion.

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Between his music, his conversations, writing to Forster, and sitting in the ladies' cabin with Kate, Charles passed the next few days contentedly. The weather improved, and Anne reappeared.

The pilot justified Charles' low opinion of him by running the *Britannia* aground outside Halifax. The captain skillfully extricated her, but they lay at anchor all night in shallow water just off the shore.

In the morning Charles hurried on deck as soon as he heard the paddles revolving. He found the vessel steaming between two pieces of land, on which stood a few wooden buildings. They rounded an island and Charles saw a mass of houses clustering down from an unfinished fort to the water's edge. They were soon so close that he could see the people in the streets and a crowd hurrying to the wharf.

He drew a deep breath at his first glimpse of the New World, and ran below to Kate.

She lay in bed with her swollen face, and he lifted her to look through the port.

"At last!" he cried. "But remember, this is still our own country. We shan't set foot in the true land of liberty till we reach Boston."

"So far as I'm concerned," she murmured, "any land means liberty after this dreadful crossing."

He combed his hair and adjusted his stock in the little mirror, and went on deck again. The ship's doctor suggested an immediate excursion on shore in search of oysters, and, the moment the ship was berthed against the pier, they leaped down the gangway.

They had not made twenty strides when a breathless man ran after them shouting, "Dickens! Dickens!"

Charles thrilled.

"Here I am," he said, while the doctor stood aside.

"I am the Speaker, sir, of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly," gasped the stranger. "I bid you welcome to Halifax, Mr. Dickens."

"You do me too much honor, sir," replied Charles, bowing.

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"Your works air known to all of us, Mr. Dickens. They air frequently quoted on the floor of the House."

"That is most gratifying," said Charles.

"I hev to request that you will honor us with your presence at the opening of our Legislative Assembly this morning, sir. And your good lady."

"I fear that Mrs. Dickens is indisposed after the crossing."

"My wife shall take care of her. We air accustomed, sir, to welcoming distinguished visitors from the old country under the most distressing conditions. There was a lady who arrived three months ago, with her wooden leg snapped in half. But that made no difference, sir, to our warmth. We carried her ashore, and a mastmaker fixed her in no time." He sent for his carriage to bring Kate to his house, where his wife would entertain her till after the ceremony.

Nodding to the doctor, Charles set off up the street with the Speaker. To every one they met the latter cried, "Gentlemen, this is Boz."

Each time he said this, the others uncovered and begged the honor of shaking Charles by the hand.

Followed by a jostling crowd, he was taken to call on the governor, Lord Falkland, and then to the Assembly building. The ceremony amused him by its miniature observance of English forms. All the flummery and mummary of Westminster were reproduced in this Colonial offshoot.

"You hold to our humbug, I see," he whispered to a member who came to ask him if he was comfortable.

"We air patriotic, Boz," was the reply.

Afterward the Speaker hurried him off to dinner at his house.

Kate had already arrived, and the Speaker's wife, with tactful hospitality, had sent her to bed. She limped in to dinner, a woebegone figure, with her head in bandages. But she was cheered by Charles' exuberant pleasure at his welcome, and by their host's deference toward him.

"Was it tactful to speak so much of the superiority of

the United States?" she asked him when they were back on board, and the *Britannia* put out again to sea.

"If you'd seen their tin-pot Assembly," he said, "and watched 'em groveling before the governor, you'd be glad to think that we're bound for the true America."

Kate was ill again next day, when the vessel wallowed through the Bay of Fundy. But the following afternoon land came into sight and, running between a group of islands, they entered the harbor just as darkness fell.

Standing beside the captain on the paddle-box, which had been repaired at Halifax, Charles caught a glimpse of the city. On what seemed to be a small circular island, but was actually a promontory, lay a fairy city of white houses and tall spires, rising from the gray-green water's edge to a stately domed building.

He sighed with pleasure.

"At last, Captain," he said, "I shall breathe the air of freedom and true democracy."

He wondered who would be there to greet him. Would they be politicians, or authors, or just a representative group of citizens?

Very slowly the *Britannia* crept through the harbor to her berth. While the mooring ropes were still being secured, a score of men clambered over the bulwarks and rushed across the deck, each with a bundle of newspapers under his arm.

Charles stepped toward them to buy a paper, when, to his surprise, the foremost, a dirty-faced individual with a goatee beard and protruding teeth, seized him by the hand, shook it violently, spat on the deck between Charles' feet and cried to his companions, "Boys, I'd like to hev yew meet my friend Dickens."

"Have I the—— Who precisely——" stammered Charles.

"Yew air goin' to say," put in the dirty stranger, "that yew hev not the pleasure of our acquaintance. Set your mind at rest, Dickens! We know yew, Dickens; that is enough."

"They are the editors; they always come aboard like this," the captain whispered.

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Charles did not realize that, in America, many members of a newspaper's staff were called "editors."

"Hey, where yew runnin' to?" shouted the dirty man to a friend who was descending the gangway.

"Goin' to reservate rooms at the hotel for Dickens and his lady."

"He never had any sense of hospitality," said Charles' tormentor, spitting in disgust. "Runnin' off like thet!"

By this time another wave of visitors had arrived, and the dirty man introduced him. "Folks, meet Dickens!"

Charles learned that nearly every one was a Colonel, though they looked more like untidy clerks; he noticed also that most of them spat diligently on the clean deck of the *Britannia*, till it was slippery with spittle.

He answered questions automatically. He was utterly bewildered. These human llamas, with their strange turns of phrase and their bustling effrontery, were not the welcome he had expected.

As he stood in their midst, a well-dressed, pleasant stranger pushed his way to him.

"My name is Alexander," he said. "You kindly agreed by letter to sit to me for your portrait. If you will permit me, I will help you to pass through the Customs House and drive to the hotel."

Alexander conducted him and Kate and Mulgrave and Anne to the polite Customs House officials.

"This is Mr. Dickens," he explained, and they waved the party through.

"You see, Kate," Charles said, "how different these Customs officials are from our own boors and the French thieves at Calais. One senses a different atmosphere, the moment one sets foot on free soil."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BOSTON was deep in snow. As they drove to their hotel, Charles exclaimed at the brightness and prosperity of the town. The carriage drew up before a long tall building, with a fine portico.

"A Government building?" he asked.

"The Tremont Hotel," said Alexander.

Charles leaped out, laughing, and dashed up the steps.

"Here we are!" he cried to the crowd which had hurried into the hall to watch his arrival.

The editor who had run on ahead led Charles and Kate to the rooms which he had reserved. They tramped up staircases and along interminable corridors, the heat of which seemed stifling after the cold air outside.

He threw open a door, and Charles entered a large bare room, where a table was laid for dinner. The neighboring room, even larger and barer, was the bedroom.

Alexander inquired if he could be of further service, and politely took his leave.

"What's that dish on the table?" Charles asked the waiter.

"Cranberries," drawled the man.

"Cranberries," Charles imitated him. "And why are there cranberries on the table?"

"I suspicioned you'd wish 'em," replied the man, and Charles had a curious sensation of conversing in a foreign language, though understanding it perfectly.

They sent for Lord Mulgrave and dined excellently. The meal began with bowls of hot stewed oysters, continued with steaks and game and ended with apple pie. To Charles' astonishment, each portion of the pie was surmounted by a slice of cheese.

"How untidy!" said Kate, till Mulgrave explained the custom to her.

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After dinner she went to bed, for her face still ached badly, and Charles and Mulgrave set off for a walk. The streets were slippery with snow and Charles ran up the center, shouting in his glee. He read out the quaint signs from the shop-fronts to his companion, laughed at the fantastic Biblical forenames of the owners and, when he reached the Old South Church, he doubled up with mirth.

"Here's the pup of Saint Paul's," he cried. "Ain't this a comic place?"

The next day was Sunday. Charles refused the various invitations to churches and passed the morning with Alexander and Mulgrave, rambling round the city. At dinner he recounted his impressions to Kate with a shrill nasal imitation of an alleged Boston accent.

"Pahsible you've heerd that the Inimitable has laanded at Baarston," he said. "Pahsible he went for a waak 's marnin'. Pahsible he saw a lot of white wooden houses and green airy railin's and brass plates on the daars like some God-A'mighty Bloomsbury. Pahsible a dozen gentlemen rack-ernized him and bade him welcome to the laand of liberty and axed him how he left the queen and Rarl Family. Pahsible——"

He ranted on, and Alexander smiled indulgently.

"I must leave you now, Mr. Dickens," he said at last. "If you need me, let me know."

Charles spent the afternoon skimming the mass of letters which were waiting for him. They came from all parts of the country, and Charles beamed at the praise. If only the copyright laws were adjusted to give him the royalties which he had earned!

Kate soon found that their stay in Boston was in the nature of a public occasion. No matter that her face was disfigured, her head aching, her legs trembling, Charles insisted that she participate in his triumph.

Not even their breakfasts were private. While they sat at the table, a sculptor to whom Charles had granted sittings worked in a corner of the room, emerging every few minutes to measure his subject's nose or chin with a pair of calipers.

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The audience rose to greet them when they visited the theater. Their walks down the street to Alexander's studio became a procession. Charles' visit to the Legislature temporarily suspended its deliberations. When he went to the Law Courts, unable at first, in the absence of robes, to distinguish between judge, counsel and prisoners, every one greeted him. The officials at prisons and asylums treated him as an expert.

He was taken by railroad to Lowell, to see the cotton-mills. Everything interested him: the noisy shabby train; the negro car in which colored people were segregated; the conductor, dressed like any one else, lounging through the cars and chatting easily to the passengers, while he clipped the tickets and placed them in the men's hatbands; the red-hot anthracite stoves in the middle of the coaches; the smoking, spitting, hawking; the desolate country which he saw through the windows; the brand-new towns, down the streets of which the train passed, the bell on the engine warning pedestrians and drivers; the pigs which wandered among the traffic—everything amused him and somehow damped his enthusiasm.

He had imagined America a primitive country where he would shine like a solitary star. Instead, he found it not fundamentally unlike the land which he had left. His dreams of a noble democracy seemed unreal.

He waited for the great public dinner at Boston, which was arranged for the beginning of the next week, to recreate his picture of America. There he would be fêted, and in his first speech he would announce the message of his visit and strike the first blow for copyright reform.

Kate and he reached the hall and were greeted by a reception committee of the "Young Men of Boston," a group of alert, smiling men, who introduced the waiting guests.

They saw in Charles a dapper little man, his frock coat thrown open to show a large double scarf-pin and a gaudily embroidered waistcoat. The heavy, double, gold watch-chain, the flower in his buttonhole, his long curly hair, combed into careful disorder, his studied gestures, his eager eyes devour-

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ing every newcomer, his constantly changing expression—all added to the theatrical effect of his appearance. He spoke little to the first rush of his admirers but, after receiving a hundred ardent and patently sincere compliments, he grew animated and began to crack jokes in quick guttural tones.

In Kate they welcomed a smiling little woman, bravely trying to ignore her swollen cheek. The best part of her face was the forehead, the worst a double chin which melted into her throat. Her fresh complexion and red lips contrasted with her large heavy eyes, veiled by sleepy lids. Her figure was buxom, inclining even to a stoutness which not even the richness of her gown—deep prune in color, as suited a matron—could disguise. She bore herself with dignity and repose; even her weariness and pain and the stare of a thousand inquisitive eyes could not ruffle her.

God Save the Queen was played, and they passed to the table. His neighbors questioned Charles politely about the crossing, listening with broad smiles to his account of the passengers and the storm, and shaking their heads at the inefficiency of the Halifax pilot. But all the time Charles felt that they were holding themselves in reserve.

"We are an eloquent people, Boz," one of them whispered. "You will be amazed at our eloquence."

The first speaker was Josiah Quincy, the son of the principal of Harvard University, and the grandson of a famous Bostonian Revolutionary War patriot. He welcomed Charles in a speech of considerable length, with references to his works and quotations of verse, and, as if in answer to the unspoken entreaties of the others not to occupy more than his fair share of the time, sat down with a toast of "Health, happiness and a hearty welcome to Charles Dickens."

Amid cheers and waving handkerchiefs, Charles rose. He had prepared his speech carefully.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the warmth of your welcome to me, symbolized by this magnificent entertainment, leaves me without words to express my gratitude. Were I addressing you as the representative of my native country, were I appealing to you in some noble cause which would touch the

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ready generosity of your hearts, I should speak as calmly, as readily, as though I sat at my own dinner table in far-off London."

A voice cried, "Bravo, Boz!"

"But so affected are my emotions by the honor you do me, that I can hardly gather the self-possession to address you. I regard you all as my brothers. There shines in your hearts the sacred domestic fire which has warmed all my own inspiration, and from where I have lighted my own humble beacon to mankind."

"Not humble, Boz!"

"Waking and sleeping I have pictured myself standing on this dear earth, surrounded by the citizens of the freest nation history has ever known."

"Hear him!"

He spoke of his books, his love of the poor, the letters which he had received in praise of Little Nell from the log cabins of the Far West.

Then he paused gravely, and reminded them of the disgrace of their copyright laws.

"Do not, I pray you, imagine," he explained, "that cupidity has any place in my thoughts. You know me too well for that. You know that I would rather enjoy the love of my fellow creatures than possess all the hoarded wealth of the Orient. Nevertheless, I can not believe that riches and the esteem of honest men need be incompatible. They are not; for Justice can unite all honorable aspirations. I do not understand why an English writer should not receive a substantial reward in America for his labors. Your consciences must tell you that your great country can not lag behind England in this respect. She must frame an international copyright agreement, in the name of Justice and to the glory of the great literary heritage which you share equally with my fellow countrymen."

He thanked them again for their welcome, and ended.

Now there would be another speech of eulogy, and he could return to the hotel, conscious that his demand for justice had sunk into their hearts.

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He had not fathomed the temper of the Young Men of Boston.

For hour after hour they rose and addressed the gathering. Some of the speeches were witty; all were complimentary; but most were compact of a delicious, unconscious humor.

There was, for example, the earnest youth who declaimed, "No brow can be so thickly shaded with indigenous laurels as not to wear with emotion those which are the growth of foreign soil. An English author may see with comparative unconcern his book upon a drawing-room table in London, but shall he chance to meet a well-thumbed copy in a log house beyond our Western mountains, will not his heart swell with pride at the thought of the wide space through which his name is diffused? Will not his lips almost unconsciously utter the expression of the wandering Trojan, *Quae regio in terris nostri non plena laboris?*"

"Can't you see me doing it?" Charles whispered to Kate.

The speeches went on and on. Only one or two of the speakers referred to the copyright laws; the rest delivered interminable orations upon British and American culture, with apt references to log cabins, prairies, Shakespeare, the Tower of Babel and the *Mayflower*.

"You'd think they had agreed to see who can bore me most," Charles muttered.

It was over at last, and Kate and her husband, their ears deafened, their limbs aching, tumbled exhausted into bed.

They set out toward New York, stopping at Hartford, where Charles, entertained by another assembly, spoke again of the matter which filled his thoughts.

"I have promised myself," he said, "that I never, during my stay in America, will fail to draw attention to a certain matter which affects every English and American writer. I mean International Copyright. I speak in no sordid sense; such is not my nature. I would far rather that my children starved and knew their father respected, than that they piled up heaps of gold and drove in their own carriages. But that is not the point—Justice must be done."

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"Talking of Justice," remarked one of his neighbors, when he sat down, "what do you think of the books which some of your countrymen have written about America?"

"I consider," Charles answered, "that such writers as Captain Marryat and Harriet Martineau have treated you shamefully. But you can rely on me for a fair and manly account of your great institutions."

At Hartford Kate collapsed.

"I must rest, Charles," she moaned. "These receptions and dinners and speeches will kill me."

"I'm worn out too, darling," he protested, "but how can I disappoint these warm-hearted people, whose only desire is to do me honor?"

"I won't appear in public with this ridiculous swollen face. Do send for a doctor, and Anne shall put me to bed."

He had to alter his plans against her recovery. The pause gave him an opportunity to attend to his correspondence and take stock of the progress of his copyright campaign.

It did not seem to have much effect. His hosts, both in their speeches and in conversation, assured him of their sympathy, but warned him that they had little hope of a change.

"Wait till we reach New York!" he told Kate. "That's where I shall be listened to. That's where the opinion of the country is molded."

He was a little surprised too by some of the people whom he met. Far from being simple-hearted barbarians, they were men whose knowledge of the world, of literature and of art far outstripped his own. He had been abroad only once before, for the hurried ten days' trip to Flanders; they had passed years in Italy and Germany. His reading was scrappy, and he knew nothing of pictures, while they seemed to have spent their lives in libraries and galleries.

He believed that he felt a touch of condescension in their attitude toward him. They might have been professors, and he a brilliant young student. How could he rejoice in the vast public welcomes, when his demand for copyright reform was disregarded, and strangers patronized him?

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He wrote to Forster to collect the signatures of prominent English writers to a letter which he could produce in support of his plea. Then the Americans would know that he spoke, not for himself alone, but as the representative of all his fellows.

They reached New York, and Charles gazed curiously through the carriage window as he drove from the wharf to his hotel.

"Did you ever see such a village lane pretending to be a city street?" he laughed to his wife. "Look at the houses! All at sixes and sevens, and not one of 'em that an English country squire would live in. Please ree-mark 'The Colonnade'—one dingy story, four weak-kneed pillars, and a sign-board! And the flag a-flyin' over the 'Flour and Feed Store' next door to that gigantic 'Leather and Finding Store,' which I do believe is nearly half as big as the parlor of our old house in Doughty Street.

"Observe the frantic crowds—two gen'l'men on horse-back, both werry sedate; one omnibus rattling to bits over the bumps, and three old coaches no better off; a citizen demonstrating his independence by spitting on the pavement; a couple of ladies in bright pink; a woolly-headed nigger quite drunk, with two companions half-ditto; and, to complete the busy picture, four pigs enjoying themselves at the expense of a rubbish heap. If this is New York give me the refined luxury of Seven Dials."

He was better pleased, however, with Broadway, its new stone buildings, its churches, and its thronging traffic. The Carlton House Hotel surprised him by its bulk. It was a vast five-storied building, very plain inside and out.

"It ain't a hotel!" he cried. "It's a prison, one of them famous solitary confinement prisons which these Yankees are so proud of."

Half an hour after they arrived, a plump, handsome stranger was shown into the room. His large gray eyes shone from a sallow face, and his lips were twisted in a whimsical, hesitating smile.

"At last we meet, Boz," he said, in a pleasant voice.

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Charles stared at him. Who was this long-nosed intruder, hiding his age by what was obviously a dark brown wig?

"Is it—— Yes, of course, it is! Kate, here's Washington Irving come to see me!"

He wrung his visitor's hand.

"You're the one man I've crossed the Atlantic to meet," he cried.

"I would have come to Boston," said Irving, "but I couldn't manage the journey. I hope you have been made comfortable."

"I can make myself comfortable anywhere, can't I, Kate? My hands are nearly shaken off, and I'm all but deaf from hearing my name shouted in varying keys. Barring that, all's well."

"I'm not surprised that you feel exhausted," smiled Irving. "The newspapers reported your reception in Boston and Hartford."

"The newspapers!" Charles snorted.

"You don't care for them? I'm prepared to admit that there's room for improvement."

"I don't mind what they say about me personally, but when it comes to misrepresenting me on the copyright question——"

"You expect too much from us, Boz. We're a young country, and have to find our feet."

"Yes, but not in my boots!—Why do the papers print such absurd stories about me? They say that I'm thunder-struck by the magnificence of America, that I'm perpetually astonished by the order and prosperity which greet my eyes at every turn, that I was never in such high society in England as I shall be in New York."

"Every country has its curse, I'm afraid, and this class of newspaper is our 'damnation.' Come, Boz, be merciful!"

"You're a splendid fellow, Irving! Your books have been an inspiration to me since I was a child; I haven't the heart to be angry any longer."

"Then tell me about England. It's ten years since I was there. Is it much changed?"

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Charles dilated on the change wrought by the development of railroads and the gradual break-up of the country life which Irving loved. The hours passed, and Kate slipped away to bed before Irving rose to go.

"We meet again on Friday at a dinner, Boz. We'll raise the copyright issue there. But you must do it. They tell me that I've to make a speech. I know that I'll break down. I'll certainly break down. You must take the will for the deed, for the deed will be villainous."

"Leave copyright to me; I'll show 'em!"

No sooner had the visitor gone, than the waiter entered.

"Is the Minister here?" he asked.

"Who?" said Charles.

"The Minister. Mr. Irving, the Minister to Spain."

"Kate, Kate!" cried Charles, dashing into their bedroom. "They've made Irving Minister to Spain! Won't I just chaff him about it at the dinner!"

Irving's gentle consideration soothed his feelings, and he prepared for the Boz Ball at the Park Theater. Kate, her face now almost well, had her hair curled, and Anne helped her into her best white silk dress, embroidered with blue flowers. Charles, very smart in a new suit and a bright striped waistcoat, drove with her to the theater.

They were ushered through a door and, before Kate had time to collect herself, an orchestra broke into *See the Conquering Hero Comes*, a roar of cheering deafened her, and she had a vision of flags, wreaths, portraits, festoons and a cloud of waving handkerchiefs.

She saw Charles smile as he shook hands with the leader of a long file of men and women, and then her own hand was seized. Till her arm ached she stood there, flushing under the gaze of an endless stream of strangers, all murmuring compliments.

Then some one clasped her waist and led her to take part in a quadrille. But at every step other couples bumped against them; they lost their partners in the set, and the dance was abandoned.

She had hardly the strength to applaud the tableaux from

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her husband's work which were now shown on the stage, and she heard him snigger at some of the American touches which had crept into the scenes. The "Pickwick Club," in particular, amused him.

"Look at their Yankee faces, all chin and teeth, and the spittoon on the floor!" he whispered. "'Pickwick Club,' indeed! They're like a conference of American editors, plotting how best to steal the copyright of an English writer."

The more he read the New York newspapers, the better he knew that his campaign for copyright reform had failed. Some of the writers were friendly, but hopeless; others, scurrilously hostile, abused him as a greedy snob. The majority advised him to refrain from further utterance on the subject.

He knew that they were right, and wished that he had not told Irving that he would raise it again at the dinner on Friday. But he determined to gloss over it.

Irving, as he had prophesied, broke down in his speech. He uttered a few halting sentences, welcoming Charles, faltered, stopped, began again, and murmured at last, "Gentlemen, I can't proceed. I told you I should break down, and I've done it. There! I'll give you the toast—Charles Dickens, the guest of the nation."

Charles did not mention the word "copyright" in his speech, nor did he refer to the subject, except once.

"I claim the right," he said, "to touch for the last time upon a question of supreme interest to those who, like myself, earn their bread with their pens. I appeal to you all to see to it that your great nation should approach this question in a spirit of fairness, and press my appeal as one who has no slender right to make it."

His promise to Irving fulfilled by these few innocuous words, Charles turned to him, laid his hand on his shoulder, and, with an eulogy, gave his name for the next toast. He had escaped from the difficulty rather neatly!

To his horror, Irving whispered, "Well done, Boz; I'll rub it in!" and soon rose again, bracing himself to speak.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I'm not going to break down

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again. I simply give you this toast: 'International Copyright—it is but fair that those who have laurels for their brows, should be permitted to browse on their laurels.' ”

Charles saw some of the diners smile and glance pityingly at him. He stared back angrily. Why the devil had he exposed himself to their impertinence? Never mind; he would pay them out when the time came to write his book about their country!

He would have liked to leave New York at once, but Kate caught another cold, which turned to a septic throat. This delayed them a week, during which time he sought to console himself by visits to prisons and asylums, and she lay in bed, Maclise's picture beside her, fretting for the children.

She had not wholly recovered when they began to travel westward. She loyally sought to conceal her discomfort from him, but her only thought was to finish the nightmare journey and see the babies again.

Besides buying an accordion in New York and improvising on it, he introduced a new terror by practising mesmerism on her. The first attempt was successful; she had a headache, and with a few passes he threw her into hysterics and then into a sound sleep. For this she was grateful, but, with his usual intensity, he practised his new art on her until she dreaded it.

He commended her fortitude on the journey, but this was small compensation for her exhaustion and her longing to see her children. Not an hour passed but she spoke of them to him or to Anne, speculating on what they were doing, their lessons, their games, their conversation, their health. She waited eagerly for each batch of letters from home, and read and reread Mrs. Macready's reports on them. Always she counted the days to their return.

The river-steamers were a novel experience. The vessels were commodious enough—the cabins usually far better than on the *Britannia*—but the other passengers destroyed Charles' last vestiges of respect for the United States.

Their table manners appalled him. They plunged their knives into a dish and lifted them direct to their mouths, from

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which a trickle of tobacco-juice exuded. They spat perpetually, though his fears for his clothes were modified by the discovery that every tobacco-chewer was skilful and fastidious in his choice of a target.

They steamed down the broad Ohio River to its junction with the Mississippi. Charles made eager inquiries and called Kate to him.

"Look!" he cried, pointing to a marshy swamp on which a few log cabins rotted. "That's Cairo, the place which enabled a Yankee scoundrel to collect a cool million pounds in good English gold five years ago."

"How do you mean?" Kate asked.

"Don't you remember the bills on the walls—pictures of a flourishing city, with fine streets, warehouses and wharves, and an invitation to invest money in the great town of Cairo?"

A wizened passenger tapped Charles on the shoulder and fixed him with his solitary eye. "Thet were 'tarnal smart, stranger," he chuckled. "Yew Britishers calc'late yew're slick, bet I rackon Cairo fixed yew."

"It was a disgraceful, blackguardly swindle, sir," shouted Charles, pointing to the steaming swamp. "To label this pestilential, ague-smitten morass a thriving city, to pretend that this moldering cemetery was a fit object for the profitable investment of the mites of widows and orphans—was there ever such a dastardly abuse of confidence and hospitality?"

The one-eyed man nodded his head.

"Yes, *sir*," he agreed. "Thet were 'tarnal smart!"

Charles told himself that such incidents were as typical of American morality as the unjust copyright laws.

He raged at every mischance—the sight of a runaway slave taken back in custody to the plantations of the South; an insufferable bore who pursued Kate and himself with a paraphrase of the Book of Job; a pair of jovial strangers who mistook him, from his dandyish attire and heavy jewelry, for a professional gambler; the people who in every town insisted on shaking hands with him.

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When they entered the last stage of their journey and reached the town of Sandusky, on the shore of Lake Erie, he refused to meet the mayor, explaining his refusal as a retort to an anti-English article in a local newspaper. The mayor took the snub philosophically, and sat on a gate near the steamer, whittling a stick, till Charles and his outraged patriotism were borne away.

He found awaiting him at Buffalo a letter from Forster, enclosing memorials, signed by Carlyle, Bulwer, Sydney Smith, Leigh Hunt and Talfourd, against the copyright laws of America. This he sent to Boston, as a proof that the greatest writers in England had taken fire at his campaign's being misrepresented as personal greed and wished to support him with their voices. He omitted to mention that he had caused Forster to canvass them.

He shouted with joy when he crossed the frontier into Canada, and obstinately remained on the British side as he gazed with wonder at the Niagara Falls.

"I wish poor Mary were here to share this tremendous spectacle," he said to Kate. "But I'm sure she's often been here in the spirit since she left her earthly form."

Kate glanced curiously at him.

"Do you really believe that, Charles?"

"I do, indeed."

"Then you think she may be with us at this moment, though we can't see her?"

"I'm convinced of it. I often feel her presence near me," he replied.

"Why don't I feel it too?" she asked.

He detected envy in her voice, and shrugged his shoulders, as if unwilling to hurt her by explaining—even if he could have explained.

At Montreal he arranged private theatricals with Lord Mulgrave and the officers of the Coldstream Guards, casting himself for the chief rôles and persuading Kate to take part. She struggled through gamely, despite her nervousness, and Charles, enchanted with his own performance, congratulated her on her acting.

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At last, six months after their departure from Liverpool, they embarked for home.

Charles had convinced himself that steamers were dangerous, because the funnel might at any moment blow off and the vessel catch fire. He insisted, therefore, on traveling in a sailing-ship, even though it would take longer. Every delay in seeing the children was torture to Kate, but, as they sailed eastward, her spirits revived.

She smiled at Charles' uproarious humor. He founded the United Vagabonds, a club which dined with ludicrous ceremonial apart from the other passengers. Jocosely declaring himself the ship's doctor, he went his rounds among the sick, accompanied by two Vagabonds who were dressed as Ben Allen and Bob Sawyer, the medical students in *Pickwick*, and carried shears and vast rolls of lint. Even *Home, Sweet Home* on the accordion achieved a certain sweetness, though she was astonished at Charles' pride in his musical prowess.

The moment they reached London they drove to the Macreadys' to greet the children.

Scarcely had the cab drawn up than Kate, too impatient to open the garden gate, was kissing Mamie through the bars. It was long past the children's bedtime, but they had been allowed to stay up for their parents' return, except Walter, the eighteen-months-old baby. Kate laughed and wept over them, hysterically pouring out questions to Mrs. Macready without waiting for her answers.

How Charley had grown! How pretty Mamie looked! How well Katey talked! How soundly Walter slept in his cot, with his head lying on his fat dimpled arm! How pleased they all were to see their mother and father again! Kate hugged them, vowing that never again would she allow herself to be separated from them.

The reunited family went to Broadstairs, where Charles set to work on his book about America. He entitled it *American Notes for General Circulation*, and gloated over the shock it would give the Americans. Clippings from their newspapers reached him while he worked. They were sour and unfriendly.

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"All American editors are damnable scoundrels," he assured Kate, "just as all American writers are too cowardly to make a public stand against literary piracy. If people only knew how they tried to prevent my fighting the abuse!"

Longfellow, the American poet, arrived in England, and came to stay at the seaside with Charles. He was a handsome, broad-browed man of thirty-five, as short as his host, his rosy cheeks clean-shaved, his eyes china-blue. He spoke in a low voice and shuddered when Charles' humor expressed itself in cries and violent movement.

Charles took him to Rochester and to London, where, under the guidance of a couple of detectives, they visited the haunts of tramps, thieves and prostitutes.

"Racken this beats Noo Yaark to 'tarnation blazes!" Charles laughed, as they left a low lodging-house behind Drury Lane.

"I have seen worse places in Rome," answered Longfellow, "and in Spain. I expect you know those caves in the Albaicin Hill at Granada where the gipsies live."

"Except for Calais and Flanders, I'm afraid I haven't traveled much in Europe," answered Charles.

"Yet you came to us in America," marveled the poet. "By the way, my countrymen are waiting for your book."

"And won't some of 'em just like it when they see it! I'll show you the manuscript."

He finished the book in time to accompany Longfellow to Bristol and see him sail for home.

The *Notes* appeared, and, despite indifferent reviews in the London press, their sales were pleasantly large. Charles waited with mischievous anticipation for their reception in America.

His critics there received the book with execration, accusing him of ingratitude and disappointment at the collapse of his copyright campaign. He published a denial, therefore, that his visit had been prompted by a desire to reform the copyright laws.

"I've another rod in pickle for 'em," he told Forster. "Wait till I put 'Merriky in a novel!"

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The departure of Longfellow left him lonely. He made up a party with Forster, Maclise and another friend, Stanfield, a sailor turned painter, choosing Cornwall for their destination. He wished to reassure himself that no scene across the Atlantic, except Niagara, was finer than could be found in Britain; and, at the same time, he proposed to place the opening of a new novel in a lighthouse on a desolate Cornish coast. It was a month before they returned.

During the trip he conceived an idea which soon crystallized into a determination: he desired to add Kate's sister, Georgina, to his household.

The charming child who had clambered on his knee in the old days of his courtship had now grown to an age suitable for companionship with him and Kate. As soon as he arrived at Devonshire Terrace and took leave of his admiring but exhausted friends, he broached the matter.

"What would you say, Kate, to Georgy's coming to live with us?" he said after dinner.

"Always, do you mean?" she asked.

"Certainly. She's growing up now, and needs friends of her own age. In your parents' house she sees no one but children or old folk."

"I'd love to have her with me, Charles; but won't it add to our expenses?"

"Never mind about that," he answered indulgently. "I'll see that we don't starve. She'll be jolly company for you when I'm away, or busy; and she can help you with the children."

"Will you go and see father and mother about it?"

"I think, Kate, the invitation had better come from you. After all, it's for your sake. I bet Georgy will jump at the chance, unless, of course, your mother raises difficulties."

Kate sounded her parents. They agreed to allow Georgina to make her own decision. To Charles' satisfaction, the girl gladly accepted. Eager to see the world of literature and fashion, she knew that her brother-in-law moved in far more agreeable circles than she could hope to enter from her father's house.

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Charles was charmed by her nature, her girlish freshness graced with a woman's intelligence. He felt her youth quicken his inspiration. Though he was only thirty, he was already middle-aged; and it was good to have this young creature close to him to breathe new life into his moods and fantasies.

He teased her about nestling in his arms when he first visited her parents and, blushing, she dexterously changed the subject.

"It's unbelievable that you're not yet seventeen, Georgy. I find myself talking to you as though you were at least five and twenty."

"And, do you know, my birthday's the same day as little Charley's," she said.

"Great heavens! There's another of those coincidences which single me out at every turn!"

He was busy with his new novel, which was to expose the tragic consequences of Selfishness. He sketched a first plan, and cast round for his hero's name.

"What say you, my pretty sisters?" he asked Kate and Georgina. "I need a name which will be at once uncommon and yet real, a name for my willain as well as for my virtuous hero. What say you to Sweezleway or Sweezlewig?—Come, Kate, I really need advice."

"I think they're both good," said Kate placidly from her book.

He shrugged his shoulders. This was not the assistance which he required.

"Of course they are," he said, "but which is the better? Georgy, what's your opinion of Sweezlewig?"

"I don't think it sounds real enough."

"What about Chuzzletoe or Chuzzleboy?"

"They're better, but——"

"Still not real enough, eh? Then perhaps Chubblewig or Chuzzlewit?"

"Chuzzlewit, Charles!"

"You're right, Georgy; I do declare you're right! Chuzzlewit he shall be, and, if he has a daughter—a lovely,

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intelligent, give-you-good-advice-when-you-need-it daughter—I shall christen her Mary after you.”

“Mary?” cried Kate. Her book fell to the floor.

“Did I say Mary?” he laughed, picking it up. “I meant Georgy, of course.—What’s the matter, Kate? You’ve turned quite pale.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"DAMNABLE hypocrisy!" cried Charles, throwing down a letter on his desk. It was a sultry June evening, and he had just returned with Kate and Georgina from a drive to Richmond.

"Whatever's the matter?" asked Kate.

"Hall's the matter! The little humbug wants to reduce my monthly check for *Chuzzlewit*."

"But how can he?"

"It's all Forster's fault. He was weak enough to agree that, if *Chuzzlewit*'s first five numbers didn't sell above a certain number, my check could be reduced by fifty pounds."

"I thought *Chuzzlewit* was doing so well, dear. Everybody praises it."

"Well, it isn't. The first part sold a beggarly twenty thousand copies. When I packed Martin off to America, I roped in a few more thousands; but it's doing nothing like what it ought."

"I can't think why, Charles," said Georgina. "It's such a magnificent story."

"Far and away my best, Georgy. What do people want? Ain't Pecksniff good enough for 'em? Ain't Mark Tapley their old favorite, Sam Weller, up to date? What's the matter with Hall, that he can't sell the parts?"

"I suppose, darling, you will have to meet his wish," said Kate.

"Why should I?" he stormed. "I'm morally entitled to my two hundred pounds a month, and I mean to have 'em. Forster told me that the clause was only put in as a matter of form, to satisfy Hall's attorneys. What's it got to do with me?"

"Surely you don't intend to quarrel with Mr. Hall?"

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"I wish you would sometimes be reasonable, Kate. I'm not going to put up with his mean little tricks any longer."

Kate was silent. She knew that any further comment would only provoke an outburst of temper.

Forster, summoned next day, pointed out that Hall's letter did no more than hint at the possibility of reducing the check, if the sales were to continue unsatisfactory. He called on the publishers and, disregarding Charles' angry instructions, warned them that, if they persisted in their threat, their most popular author would certainly leave them. Hall at once withdrew his letter, and agreed to pay the full monthly check, whether or not the sales justified it.

Charles interpreted this concession as tantamount to an avowal of guilt. He demanded an instant and final break with a firm which, he insisted, had treated him abominably. Recalling that Hall's printers, Bradbury and Evans, had once expressed willingness to act as his publishers, he asked Forster to approach them at once for a definite offer.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Forster. "You are overwrought. I have shut Hall's mouth; and he has given way. Why do you wish to foment more trouble, when you are not yet half-way through *Chuzzlewit*?"

"I don't care a rap! I mean Hall to know that I'll have nothing more to do with him."

"Yes, yes, I understand you," replied Forster soothingly. "But do wait! You may change your mind."

"I never change my mind! I'm determined to show that canting little hypocrite who's master, he or I."

In the end he took Forster's advice, but carried his complaints against Hall and his exasperation at the comparative failure of *Chuzzlewit* to Broadstairs, where he spent the autumn with his household.

His state of mind was not improved by the hostile reception of the American scenes in *Chuzzlewit* in the United States. He was making the Americans smart; but how much pleasanter everything would have been if only they had taken his advice and reformed their copyright laws!

To increase his moroseness, Forster fell sick and was less

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often available to comfort Charles with his masculine friendship.

These were the least happy months which Kate had known since her marriage. No matter what she did, her moody husband was displeased. Though he insisted that he had never written with such power, he could not conceal from himself that he was losing his hold on the public. When she tried to reassure him, he accused her, with angry self-pity, of wishing to delude him. If she did not try to cheer him, he complained that she was a drag on his invention.

He entertained lavishly, to divert his thoughts. Forster came down occasionally to recuperate in the sea air. John and Mrs. Dickens were invited, as well as Fanny and Letitia and their husbands, and Fred Dickens. The solicitors, Mitton and Smithson, and their wives took a neighboring house.

Staying with the Smithsons were two friends—Eleanor, a girl just out of her teens, and Millie, several years her senior.

One morning after breakfast, Charles strolled past their lodgings, a gorgeous red carnation in the buttonhole of his checked suit, and saw the two young women on the balcony.

"She's my heart's only queen! She's the rapturous goal of my desires!" he cried, clutching one hand to his heart and extending the other toward them.

"How expansive you are this morning, Mr. Dickens!" laughed Eleanor. "When we bade you good morning yesterday, you hardly looked at us."

"My heart was torn by jealous passion," he explained. "I had seen my soul's delight in converse with a loathly rival."

"Which of us is your soul's delight?" tittered Millie.

"Would that I were the parasol which shields her damask cheek from the rude kisses of the too ardent sun!" Charles continued.

"Yes, but which of us, Mr. Dickens?" Millie persisted. "If you don't tell, we shall quarrel over you."

"She's vichsomever you like, my ducks," he answered. "Come now, can't you drag Smithson and his better half out for a picnic?"

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"If you'll promise not to be naughty," said Millie.

"On bended knee I vow it, lovely damsels. Await me and my harem at eleven!"

The party set off in two carriages. In the first rode Millie and Eleanor, Charles and Fred. The other held Kate, Georgina and the Smithsons. Charles had refused to drive with Kate, declaring that her existence prevented his union with Millie or Eleanor, or both. All the way Kate heard his companions' laughter, as he elaborated his joke.

While the women packed the plates and glasses after the luncheon, he rambled away with Fred and returned with a penny broadsheet of comic songs.

"Look vot that perseweerin' cove, the Sparkler, has bin an' gone an' bought!" he cried. "Now he can beguile your shell-like ears with meelodious numbers."

He held the sheet at arm's length, burlesquing a concert-singer, and sang loudly, while Fred whistled a piercing accompaniment.

"Werry good, Freddy, werry excellent indeed! Keep it up, my boy, keep the pot a-bilin'," he said, gathering breath between the verses.

Cries of protest from Kate and the Smithsons brought him to a stop.

"Vot's the matter?" he inquired.

"Spare us, Charles, please," Kate begged. "If you must sing, do it quietly."

"Vot's the good of the Sparkler spendin' a whole penny on a broadsheet, if he ain't allowed to sing arter his own inoffensive fashion?" And he began again, louder than before.

When this amusement at last wearied the brothers, they announced that they had decided to run away to sea.

"Ahoy there, driver," cried Charles, as they climbed into the waiting carriages. "Keep a smart lookout from your crow's-nest. Starboard your hellum, tarry trousers; hellum your starboard! You barnacled son of an electic eel, reef your taffrail!"

"All aboard for home, you landlubbers," Fred burst in,

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as Charles lay speechless with laughter. "Port your tops'l, cap'n, mizzen your marlinespike!"

"Georgy," yelled Charles to the other carriage, "I'm a jolly sailor-boy a-singin' up aloft. I've a wife in every port, but don't tell Kate!"

"Your husband is in very good spirits to-day, Mrs. Dickens," said Mrs. Smithson.

"Very," replied Kate, flushing.

When they reached Broadstairs again, Charles insisted on filling the interval before supper by a visit to the jetty. Ordering Fred to whistle a tune, and himself making noises on his pocket-comb and a piece of paper, he danced a horn-pipe, calling the others to admire his skill. Then suddenly he seized Eleanor, the younger girl, and whirled her down the sloping ramp which joined the jetty to the beach.

"Here we will remain, my heart's desire," he hissed in her ear, "until the wild waves rise and cover us with their fatal embrace. If thy jolly sailor-boy can not possess thee, thou shalt never be another's. Behold, the tide riseth! Already the wavelets kiss thy toothsome feet."

"Let me go, Mr. Dickens, please," cried the girl. "I shall be wet."

"Consider not such mundane trifles," he replied. "Think rather of the newspaper reports how Charles Dickens, the Inimitable Boz, dragged thee to a watery grave in his demented passion."

"My dress!" shrieked Eleanor. "That last wave caught it. It's my best dress, my new silk dress!"

"I spurn thy prayers, damsel. Here thou mustest remain, till death unites us in everlasting bliss."

"Mrs. Dickens!" the frantic girl appealed to Kate, "Make him let me go! I'm soaked to the skin."

"Charles," cried his wife, "don't be so foolish! You'll both catch cold."

"She speaks of colds," ranted Charles, "when we are standing on the door-mat of eternity. Shall the jolly sailor-boy restrain his mirth?"

He broke into a peal of melodramatic laughter. As he

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laughed, his grip on the girl slackened; she tore herself from his arm and scrambled up to Mrs. Smithson and Kate.

"Run home this moment and change your dress, child," said Mrs. Smithson severely. "How could you forget yourself so?"

"But it wasn't my fault."

"Hurry, or you'll be late for Mr. Dickens' supper."

Eleanor, much distressed, hastened away in her sopping dress, as Charles arrived, sniggering at his exploit.

"You shouldn't encourage her," Mrs. Smithson said to him.

"Vot a spree! Weren't she frightened!"

"You ought to give her a new dress, Charles. Hers is ruined," Kate told him.

"Always a spoil-sport, aren't you?" he mocked. "Give her one of *your* dresses! You won't need 'em for another three or four months!"

Kate led the way home in silence.

Forster and the others awaited them. Eleanor, subdued and red-eyed, crept into the room during the meal, at the close of which the insatiable Charles demanded a quadrille.

"I crave the honor of a dance, divine empress of my soul," he announced, seizing Millie in his arms. "Wilt tread a measure with me? Fanny, noblest of sisters, oblige us at the piano! Grace my wooing with dulcet music! Take your partners, please, while the jolly sailor-boy and the sublime pattern of the fair sex lead the chaste quadrille."

Kate sat, smiling but pale, between her father-in-law and Forster. She watched Charles ape a love-lorn youth, assume an air of smirking devotion to Millie, blow kisses to Eleanor, affect extravagant disregard for herself when he passed her, disconcert the other dancers by his buffoonery.

"I am the youngest gentleman at Mrs. Todger's," he announced, "an establishment which must be familiar to you all in *Chuzzlewit*. I am love-sick; my heart faints at beholding my charmer—my two charmers. I can not abide my wife; I meditate self-slaughter, or, at the very least, a romantic elopement. With which of the two shall I flee? Shall it

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be the mature damsel who swoons with rapture in my arms? Or shall it be the beauteous child whom I behold, entwined in the arms of a hated rival?"

He dashed across the room and wrenched Eleanor from her partner.

"Behold, the youngest gentleman has torn his beloved from his rival's clutches. She is his—his for ever more. Come, mistress of all delights, rest thy head upon the junior gent's manly chest."

The quadrille broke down, and Fanny stopped playing. He now affected to see Millie disconsolate.

"What have I done?" he cried. "Hapless wretch that I am, my heart is split in twain. I adore them both—don't tell a soul!—and both adore me. I can't live without 'em. I'm a bigamist, a trigamist, a four-five-six-seven-gamist! Courage, my fluttering heart, courage!"

Fanny tried to smother the general embarrassment by resuming her music, but Charles, sweat pouring from his forehead, still ran from one girl to the other, falling grotesquely on his knees at their feet, wafting kisses to them, ogling them with sheepish glances.

"My dear," John whispered to Kate, "you must permit me to apologize for my son's behavior. I feel my position acutely. Charles would doubtless describe this exhibition as a mere effervescence of animal spirits, a blowing-off of steam—in vulgar parlance, a lark. On his inconsiderateness I will not expatiate. I merely apologize."

He leaned back in his chair. Kate turned to Forster with an appealing gesture.

"Your father-in-law has spoken of what I would rather have overlooked," he said. "I confess my agreement with him. We know that Charles means nothing, but these ladies are strangers to his humor and may take him seriously. It is all in very poor taste."

"What's in poor taste, Mr. Forster?" asked Georgina airily, catching his last words.

"My son's behavior, miss," replied John, before the others could stop him.

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"Charles' behavior?" She paled with astonishment.

Forster interposed. "It's nothing at all, Miss Georgina," he said. "Merely a remark which Charles let fall at supper and which wounded his father's feelings."

The explanation was patently unsatisfactory, and John fidgeted under Georgina's gaze.

"You are being tactful, Mr. Forster," she said coldly. "I can only suppose that some one has been ill-natured enough to criticize Charles' good spirits." She moved away, leaving confusion behind her.

Kate made an excuse to retire early to bed, where her husband joined her several hours later.

"I do think you might have stayed down-stairs a little longer, Kate," he complained, struggling to undo the buckle of his stock. "You always throw on me the whole task of amusing our guests. You're inconsiderate."

She looked up at him with a long scrutinizing glance, in which sorrow, contempt and affection mingled. She made no answer, and he too was silent.

A few days after their return to Devonshire Terrace, he called the sisters to his study.

"I have summoned you to a family council," he said gravely. "We are spending far too much money. I'm not blaming you, Kate, but we must alter our style of living."

"We might entertain less," she suggested.

"That would be only niggling economy. I propose to cut down our expenditure by a half. What do you say to living abroad in France or Italy for six months next year?"

Her answer halted. "I—I don't know, Charles."

"And you, Georgy?" he asked, turning toward the girl's eager face.

"Lovely! I've always dreamed of going to Italy."

Kate recalled the American visit.

"What about the children?" she asked in a trembling voice.

"We'll take 'em with us," he said.

Her heart leaped at his thoughtfulness. Then she considered.

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"But, Charles, have you forgotten? In January——"

"Oh, we shan't go till the summer. The baby can stay with your mother."

"I will not leave the baby," said Kate, with determination in her soft voice. "I'm shocked that you suggest it, when you write so much of a mother's love for her children."

"Then he must come too. Georgy will help you to look after him—or her—or even them, if it's twins."

"We can't look after four little children—there'll be five next year—in a strange country without help. We shall have to take Anne and Nurse with us."

"Any one would think I'd made a fortune in the railroads," he retorted. "Do try to understand what economy means, Kate! Seriously, my dears, if I'm to go on earning an income for us all, I must have a long spell abroad to recruit my finances and my power. My love for you all forces me to consider myself first—for this once."

"We must take Anne and Nurse," Kate insisted.

"Oh, have it your own way then!" he said. "We leave as soon as *Chuzzlewit* is finished."

"Oh, Kate, I can't think why you aren't delighted," said Georgina reproachfully, as Charles closed the door behind him. "Why didn't you say 'Yes' at once?"

Kate shook her head.

"You're a dear, Georgy, but you don't know Charles yet. If I weren't firm at times, we'd spend our whole lives rushing off whenever the notion took him, and coming home again immediately afterward. I'm quite ready to go abroad, so long as I have the children with me, but I want Charles to understand exactly what it means."

"He understands everything." Georgina's tone was devotional.

Kate smiled with a tinge of bitterness.

"You're wrong there, Georgy. He's the most impetuous creature on earth. When Mr. Forster isn't here to talk reason to him—I must."

His decision improved Charles' temper. Though resentment at Hall remained, he felt that one of his chief

difficulties was settled, and he went off to make a speech at Manchester in the nearest approach to an easy mind which he had known for months. The occasion appealed to him; it was the inauguration of a great institution to assist working men in self-education. He spoke from the same platform as Disraeli, was wildly applauded, and returned radiant to London.

"If *Chuzzlewit* ain't selling," he told Kate, "it's because Hall don't know his job. You should have seen the enthusiasm when I got up to speak. I thought they'd never stop cheering. I taught that popinjay politician a lesson, I'll be bound."

"Did you see Fanny?"

"Poor girl, she's very ill. She coughed all the time, and she's terribly worried about the child—she's given up hope that he'll ever grow strong. He has to sit always in his chair, and can't play. He just gazes at the world through those great sad eyes of his, as if he knew that he was different from other children."

Kate's eyes filled with tears. "Can nothing be done?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I told her to bring him to London and consult the best doctors, and I'd pay the fees. But I know it's useless. Nothing can help the poor boy in this world.—He gave me an inspiration for a Christmas story."

"A Christmas story?"

"A sort of fairy-tale, contrasting the selfish, canting, hypocritical rich who don't understand the spirit of Christmas, with the humble, happy poor who do. I think of calling it *A Christmas Carol*. It'll be such a smack in the eye for cant and humbug."

He became absorbed in the story of Scrooge and the Spirits, introducing Fanny's crippled child into the plot as Tiny Tim. After ten days' steady writing, he read the first half to the sisters.

"What do you think of it, Kate?" he asked.

"It's very, very good indeed," she replied.

"And you, Georgy?"

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The girl regarded him with a rapt stare of awe and admiration.

"It's thrilling, Charles; it's so inspiring! It will do more good to the world than all the sermons ever preached."

"That's just what I think; you've hit it exactly. I'm putting all my philosophy into it. What's more, it'll do the Inimitable more good than all the sermons ever preached. It'll sell like hot cakes."

"Who will publish it?" Kate asked.

"I shall allow Hall to sell it for me on commission."

"So you're friendly with him again?" she said, surprised.

"Not at all. Forster's negotiating with Bradbury and Evans to be my publishers in future. If I had my way, I'd pay off my debt to Hall for the copyrights he repurchased for me, and break with him at once. But Forster thinks I'd be foolish to upset him till *Chuzzlewit's* finished. Once that's out of the way, Master Hall will have to sing very small, I can tell you."

The *Carol* appeared a few days before Christmas, and a first edition of six thousand copies, at five shillings each, was sold within a few hours. Charles, overjoyed, kept Christmas uproariously. He compelled Forster to a round of children's parties, dancing, theater-going and conjuring, till his convalescent friend nearly suffered a relapse.

At the beginning of the third week of the year Kate bore a son, her fifth child in less than eight years.

Charles was detained in London during her confinement, by the trial of his action against certain imitators of the *Carol* and *Chuzzlewit*. He won his case easily, but was staggered to learn that all the costs would fall upon him, since the defendants were without means. He filled the house with fulminations against the Courts, against all publishers, against the copyright laws.

"What a shame you've never finished your law course at the Middle Temple," remarked Kate innocently, during one of these outbursts. "Then you could have conducted your own case."

"Believe me, Kate, I'm glad not to be mixed up with the Law," he growled. "One of these days I'll expose it."

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He waited eagerly for the *Carol* accounts, for he was very seriously worried about money. When they came, he fell into a rage.

"It's incredible," he cried. "Ten thousand copies sold; and all I'm to receive is a miserable three hundred pounds. Why, Hall's taking nearly as much in commission. It's sheer, stark robbery. He's faked the accounts; I'm certain of it."

This crowning disappointment fixed his determination to break with Hall and go abroad. He assured Forster that he was on the brink of ruin, and begged him immediately to complete the negotiations with Bradbury and Evans. And, to offset the *Carol's* financial failure, he thought of returning to journalism.

Black, his old editor on the *Chronicle*, had been forced to retire in favor of a nominee of the proprietor, but Charles had not lost touch with the paper and had latterly written for it one or two articles on social questions. He now suggested a regular series of contributions, naming ten guineas as his fee for each. The new editor could not agree to this, but proposed that Charles should send him a weekly letter during his foreign trip, for which an adequate salary would be paid.

Charles took the offer to Forster, and together they called at the office of Bradbury and Evans. He thus came for the first time into close contact with the partners in the establishment where so much of his work had been printed.

Bradbury was a stern, square-faced man, whose precise manner reminded Charles of the lawyers in his old Gray's Inn days; but Evans was a genial Pickwick, though his chubby cheeks and care-free untidiness overlay a shrewd business mind. He it was who conducted most of the negotiation for the printers.

They urged Charles to refuse the *Chronicle* offer, as they were interested in a project, not yet fully developed, of launching a new Liberal daily newspaper, for which his travel sketches might be most welcome. They suggested, moreover, that he should at once authorize them to republish his stories in a cheap edition, and edit a magazine for them on the lines of the *Miscellany* or *Master Humphrey's Clock*.

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Neither idea appealed to Charles—the cheap edition because he was not confident that it would succeed at a moment when his popularity had ebbed; the magazine because it would prevent his going abroad. For the present, he told Forster as they walked away, his only desire was to free himself from Hall's clutches.

"Leave it all to me," replied his friend. "I'll see you through."

"Now for furrin parts," laughed Charles, "as the light-fingered lady observed v'en the unmerciful beak sentenced her to transportation!"

Though he had not yet decided where to go, he began to worry Kate about preparations for the journey, and placed the renting of Devonshire Terrace in the hands of two agents.

With a vague impression that Nice would provide a convenient headquarters for the family while he explored southern France and Italy, he sought advice from Lady Blessington and D'Orsay. They counseled him, however, to stay at Albaro, a village just outside Genoa, famous because Byron had once lived there. Charles wrote to a friend in Italy to secure the poet's house. It proved to be almost in ruins, with its ground floor transformed into a common wine-shop, and Charles agreed to rent a neighboring villa instead. Next he bought, at second hand, a gigantic traveling carriage. He made a joke of its shabby enormity, boasting of its curious fittings and of his shrewdness in paying only fifty-five pounds for it.

He counted the days to his departure, like a prisoner whose release draws near. His mood found strange channels of expression; in some ways he became tender, in others almost savage.

He learned one day from Kate that the children, while walking in Regent's Park with their nurse, had overheard foul language. Justly indignant, he consulted the new Metropolitan Police Act and, discovering that the utterance of obscenities was an offense, haunted the park in search of the culprits. A girl passed a coarse comment on him to a

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tittering group of young hooligans; he followed her on the other side of the road till they reached a policeman.

"You know who I am," Charles said to him.

"Yes, sir, you're Mr. Dickens, vot lives in Devonshire Terrace."

"Very well then; I desire you to take this girl into custody on a charge of using indecent language in a public place."

"I ain't never 'eard as how that's chargeable, sir," the constable answered doubtfully.

"I have gone into the matter carefully, my friend. Will you accept my word that you won't get into trouble by arresting her?"

"If you say so, sir, I'll chance it," said the man, and ordered the frightened girl, whose companions had run away, to accompany him to the police-station.

Charles hurried home to fetch his copy of the Act and, producing it at the station, compelled a reluctant inspector to take the charge. Next morning he attended the magistrate's court to give evidence against her.

"I'm not certain that this charge can be pressed," the magistrate said coldly. "It is not an offense known to the Law."

"I wish it were better known," retorted Charles, drawing the Act from his pocket. "Here it is, in black and white."

He passed the document to the clerk, who handed it to the magistrate.

"You appear to be right," said the last testily. "Put her in the dock!"

The trembling girl, clad in her best white apron and straw bonnet, pleaded not guilty. Charles gave his evidence, adding a homily on the perils to which his children were exposed in Regent's Park.

The girl admitted that she had used the words of which he complained.

"Come now, sir," said the magistrate, "you don't really want me to send this young person to prison?"

"If I didn't," replied Charles firmly, "why should I take the trouble to come here?"

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The magistrate shook his head.

"I regret that you force me to sentence her, Mr. Dickens," he said. Then, turning to the girl, "This gentleman insists on your being punished. You must pay a fine of ten shillings or, in default, go to prison for ten days."

The girl, wailing that she had not the money, was led away to the cells, while Charles, triumphant though ruffled by the magistrate's reluctance to press the charge, walked home to tell Kate how he had made the Park safe for the children.

"You paid the girl's fine, of course?" she said. "You didn't let her go to prison?"

"Oh, no! Certainly not!" he sneered. "We couldn't permit a delicate young individual like that go to prison, could we?—Really, my love, are you entirely indifferent to the welfare of our babies?"

Before the girl was out of jail, Charles had to vacate his house. One of the agents had found a tenant who insisted on immediate possession, and Charles, though detesting the hurried move, transferred his family to lodgings for the last few weeks before the departure abroad.

His discomfort was mitigated by Forster's announcement that he had completed the negotiations with Bradbury and Evans. The printers were to give Charles an advance of two thousand eight hundred pounds, against a fourth part in whatever he wrote in eight years from the next January. He was not tied down to any particular number of books; even if he wrote nothing, he need pay no interest on the advance.

Complimenting Forster warmly on his diplomacy, he set aside a part of this sum to make up, with his profits from the *Carol* and his share in the proceeds of *Chuzzlewit*, the full amount of his indebtedness to Hall. The remainder he banked for his expenses abroad until he began to write again.

As he attached his florid signature to the foot of the agreement, he felt the last of his troubles vanish. He read the proofs of the final monthly part of *Chuzzlewit* with a light heart, wrote a preface to the complete novel, packed the books and the folding desk which were to follow him by

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sea to Genoa, paid visits to his friends, and attended a farewell dinner in his honor at Greenwich.

Early next morning the giant carriage drew up before the door of the lodgings and, aided by Forster, he began to stow his family in it. Kate, weary with packing,—both for the move into lodgings and then for their travels,—entered first, followed by the excited Georgina. Then came Charley, a handsome, precocious boy of seven. Mamie, his sister,—who inherited her father's quick temper, beneath a mask of her mother's sweetness,—gave a hand to mischievous, bright-eyed Katey, her junior by eighteen months. Anne, the maid, lifted in Walter, who had lately celebrated his third birthday but still wore frocks. Next the nurse mounted with Francis, the baby, in her arms, and the buxom cook followed.

There were ten of them already in the coach, but a place remained for Charles. When they were all settled in, Forster slammed the door and hoisted Timber, the dog, among the luggage on the roof.

"Exit the Sparkler with his caravan of human vunders!" cried Charles.

"I shall look forward to your letters, my dear friend," said Forster, shaking his hand through the window.

"Don't lose 'em, my Mammoth, whatever you do," Charles warned him. "Show 'em to everybody, of course, but keep 'em for my use afterward."

The fortnight's journey to Marseilles passed pleasantly for Charles, ecstatically for Georgina, and not too disagreeably for Kate, despite her numerous anxieties. The courier whom Charles had engaged, endeared himself to every member of the party by his thoughtfulness for their comfort, his sly and practical avoidance of difficulties, and his observations in broken English on the incidents of the road.

They traveled from Marseilles to Genoa by sea, and reached the villa at Albaro without mishap. The only fault that Charles found with the journey was its expense, amounting to nearly two hundred pounds. Kate privately wondered if his search for economy abroad would not in the end prove more costly than staying at home.

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The villa disappointed them. It was an ugly pink house, its rooms bare and drafty, the courtyard choked with weeds. Kate feared that the children, missing the coziness of their London nurseries and familiar food, would sicken.

Charles' grumbles had another source: he decided that he was paying an exorbitant rent. On one of his walks with Georgina he discovered an old palace by the sea, picturesque, well furnished and surrounded by woods. He could have taken it at a quarter of the rent of the Albaro villa! This completed his discontent with his quarters, and he and Georgina began a search for a winter residence in Genoa itself, leaving Kate to wrestle with the problems of house-keeping in a strange land. Except for the courier, her servants knew no Italian; she found the shopkeepers incorrigibly lazy—it was impossible to rely on them for the delivery of supplies. To increase her burdens, the weather broke. Fog and heavy rain kept Charles indoors, and it fell to her to distract his boredom.

She welcomed, therefore, the arrival of the box containing his writing materials. A case of his books, however, was detained in the customs, and he stormed at the obscurantist officialdom of the Sardinian Kingdom, of which Genoa formed a part. She encouraged him to unpack his desk and arrange it in the best bedroom, which he had appropriated as his study, for she was aware that he would not settle to work till the familiar objects lay before him. He seemed to gather inspiration from the sight of the long ivory paper knife, engraved with his initials and stained with his favorite ultramarine ink, and the bronze paper-weights—one a leaf on which sat a rabbit, the second a pair of toads duelling with swords, and the last a dog-pedler, his wares peeping from his pockets and from beneath his arms. Beside these he placed a small green cup, enameled with cowslips, which Georgina filled every morning with freshly gathered flowers. He placed his desk at a window, whence he could gaze across the vineyards to the sea.

"Now I think I really shall be able to do some work," he told Kate.

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"I've done my best to help," she replied. "I've told the servants not to chatter; and the children will go with Georgy to the beach whenever the weather's good enough."

"Why with Georgy? Why not with you?" he asked.

"Some one must look after the house," she reminded him.

"I want you to be comfortable."

"I suppose you'll be strumming on the piano as soon as I settle down. I can't think why you wanted to hire one."

"The children have to practise. But you won't be disturbed, dear. I shall keep it locked, except when you're out walking."

"What makes Timber whine so much?"

"I'm afraid he's got fleas in his coat; but I've given orders that he's to be clipped this afternoon, so that he won't bother you any more."

"I wish you could do something about the crickets. Their chirping's enough to drive me mad."

"I wish I could," she smiled, "but they won't listen to me.—Never mind, you'll soon get used to them."

Wearied with the strain of the journey, of battling with conditions in a strange land, and of mothering her children, her servants and her husband, she longed to lie in the garden, to read, to sleep, to relax. Her hopes were frustrated by Katey's falling ill. It was not a dangerous or a long illness, but it sufficed to upset the household and break Charles' working mood.

He engaged an Italian master. As his knowledge of the language grew, he desired to air his new accomplishment. This meant expeditions to Genoa, visits to the theater, and excursions to local religious houses and *festas*. When he tired of these diversions he hurried to Marseilles to meet his brother Fred, and brought him back over the Corniche road for a fortnight's visit. This exertion and much sea-bathing overtaxed Charles' strength, and Kate soon had him on her hands as an invalid. He tossed sleepless through the sultry nights, his complaints filtering through the sheet of gauze which she stretched over him to keep the mosquitoes at bay.

He recovered in time to superintend the transfer to

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Genoa for the winter. Kate was not sorry to move to the new lodging, a floor in an old palace standing high over the city. She anticipated that it would be more convenient and comfortable than the villa.

Charles was thrown into a good humor by a discovery which he made about their neighbors in the apartment below. The head of this household, he reported, was a Spanish Duke, whose wife had been his mistress and borne him many daughters; he had promised to marry her if she gave him a son, and, when this at last happened, he announced the fulfillment of his vow by marching into her bedroom and exclaiming, "Good morning, Duchess."

The Duke's overpowering desire for an heir fascinated Charles. He commented on it repeatedly to Kate, wrote of it to Forster, and stored it in his memory for future use.

On the evening of their arrival, he complained of rheumatism, and went to bed after dinner, groaning with pain as he knelt to say his prayers. He lay for hours listening to the bells of a neighboring convent chime the quarters. At last he fell into an uneasy doze, and Kate too slept.

Suddenly she awoke. He had seized her by the arm and was shaking her violently.

"Kate, Kate!"

"What's the matter, dear?" she asked. "Is your side hurting you again?" She saw that his eyes were wild, and tears ran down his cheeks.

"I have had a vision," he cried.

"Hush, dear; you'll rouse the house!"

"It was a revelation! Listen! I want you to remember exactly what I tell you, so that in the morning I can note down every detail. It was so vivid—more vivid than anything I have ever seen in my waking hours."

She wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead, though he shook his head irritably.

"I stood in a strange unknown place," he began, "and suddenly she appeared."

"Who appeared?" she yawned.

"A graceful woman draped in blue, like a Madonna. I

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could not see her face, but I knew that she was Mary. I felt no fear, only a great joy. I stretched out my arms to her and said, 'My dear'; but she moved out of reach, and I understood that I ought not to have addressed her so familiarly. She seemed filled with pity for me. 'Form a wish!' she said. I told myself that I must not make a selfish wish, or she would vanish; so—I don't know why—I said to her, 'Which is the true religion?'—Oh, don't go to sleep, Kate!"

"I'm listening, dear," she said, opening her eyes again.

"She didn't reply and, fearing she would leave me, I added hastily, 'Is the Roman Catholic the best, since it makes one think of God more often and more steadily?' With a wonderful tenderness toward me, so wonderful that I thought my heart would break, she answered, 'Yes, for you it is the best.' Then I woke up." He paused for her comment.

She did not speak immediately, doubtful what attitude to adopt. She decided to try to soothe him.

"I suppose, Charles, the altar made you dream this," she said.

"What altar?" he demanded.

"The one in the wall over there, with the Madonna's face blurred. Don't you remember saying yesterday that you wondered what the face must have been like?"

"But, Kate, my question and her answer?"

"The noise of the convent bells in your ears."

"You don't understand, Kate. You're treating it all as a dream. I tell you it was more, far more! It was a revelation, a vision!" He paced the marble floor in his nightshirt, excitedly adding new details. She listened patiently, fighting against her sleepiness.

"Come to bed, dear," she said, when she could not suppress another yawn. "You'll catch cold. Try to go to sleep and forget all about it!"

He turned on her.

"Great God!" he cried. "I don't want to forget it! It was a moment which will live for ever in my heart—the

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supreme spiritual experience of my life. It was a communication from that dear girl.—But there, you wouldn't understand. You never understand."

When Kate next woke, it was morning, and Charles was writing down his memory of the vision. He appealed to her for confirmation, but her recollections were confused.

"Don't be angry, Charles," she said, when he glowered at her. "What does it matter what the thing said to you? You know that you don't intend to turn Catholic. You always laugh at them."

He stalked away to breakfast with Georgina. The girl's adoration for him, and the tone of conviction with which he recounted the dream, made her see it as vividly as he did, and share his belief in its reality. Her awed interest consoled him. She accompanied him up the hillside through the vineyards, while he repeated every detail of the vision and expounded his religious beliefs. They sat down to rest on a bench outside a peasant's cottage, and she looked up at him with brimming eyes and clasped hands.

"Do you know, Georgy," he said, as they turned homeward, "you are the living image of Mary. Had I seen her face last night, it would have been yours. I've always noticed the likeness; I wrote to your mother about it when you first came to live with us. And not only your face resembles hers; your character too—your frankness, your delicacy, your sympathy and understanding—are all hers. She was just your age when I lost her."

He stopped and watched a lizard flicker across their path. Then he turned to her again.

"Georgy, you know what a life I have to lead. My work makes inordinate demands on my brain, on my heart, on my very soul. I need a dear companion to comfort me, to stimulate me. Mary was that; and you can fill the place she left. Will you?"

It was an age of romantic and sentimental friendships. Every genius had his Egeria, and Georgina was thrilled that Charles, the most wonderful being of the age, appealed to her for inspiration and spiritual companionship.

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"I will do all I can to make your life easier, Charles," she said. "I promise."

Kate was waiting in the dining-room when Charles entered.

"Here you are at last," she laughed. "The children had their meal long ago; they declared they wouldn't wait any longer."

Charles' face, which had been bright with the reflection of Georgina's sympathy, hardened. He mumbled grace and sat down in silence.

Spurred to fresh activity by his understanding with Georgina, he turned now to writing a second Christmas book.

The *Carol* had contrasted the hard-hearted rich with the loving-kindness of the poor; and in his new book he proposed once more to champion the outcast and the down-trodden. As he watched his happy brood of children, he thought pitifully of a certain hungry little wretch, condemned to weary toil in a blacking factory. He reviewed the merry Christmas festivities of his recent years, and contrasted them with the needy homes where the approach of Christmas was dreaded. Lines from Thomas Hood's *Bridge of Sighs*, not long published, came into his mind. He boiled at the thought of despairing mothers whom poverty drove to the river, and of a pompous London alderman who had expressed his intention to "put down suicide." Yes, the new book must strike another resounding blow for the poor, and tear again the brazen mask of hypocrisy and cant from their tyrants' faces!

The convent bells clanged incessantly; his rheumatism persisted, and he missed the familiar sights and scents of London. Despite this he jotted down notes for the story as they crowded upon him. The figures put on flesh; the scenes fell into order. As his hero he pictured a poor old London messenger who had lost faith in the virtues of his own class. The man must be shown the fruits of his despair, in a dream of his daughter's suicide. Waking, he would recapture his belief in his fellow poor. All Charles needed was a

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setting for his hero's conversion, a whimsical frame for the story. He sighed wearily as the bells recommenced their clamor. How lusty was the peal of an English belfry, compared with this thin jangling! Suddenly an idea flashed upon him—what if he opened the story with the bells of a London church, personifying their chimes as goblins and making these his hero's ghostly guides? He seized his pen again, and wrote a few rapid paragraphs. Then he set the title at the head of the page—*The Chimes*.

No work had ever so enthralled him, or satisfied him so well as it developed. He blended humor with indignation, pathos with scorn. As soon as the first portion was finished, he read it to the sisters, rejoiced in their praises and, taking a shorthand copy lest it went astray in the post, dispatched it to Forster. Before he had completed the rest, his friend's enthusiastic criticism arrived, with a welcome postscript that Hall anticipated for *The Chimes* a sale far exceeding that of the *Carol*.

The manuscript was ready within six weeks of its inception. The moment he packed it for the mail, he felt an intense loneliness and desire for London. If only he were with his cronies to hear their applause!

He had asked Forster to make any necessary minor alterations in the proofs; but who could correct them as well as the author? Time would not allow their being sent out to Genoa; so why should he not rush to London for a few days? There he could pass the proofs, read the story aloud to his friends, and feel them respond as he played on their emotions. He dashed off a letter to Forster,—signed "The Bellman" in allusion to *The Chimes*,—asking him to collect an audience for the reading. Carlyle must come; Mrs. Carlyle too, if possible; Macready, Stanfield and Maclise, D'Orsay and two or three others.

As the printers needed a fortnight to set up the book, he proposed to spend the interval in a tour of northern Italy. He set off with the courier to Parma and Venice and thence to Milan, where Kate and Georgina met him for a couple of days' sightseeing.

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Snow was falling when he reached London on the last night of November and drove to a hotel in Covent Garden. Leaving the maid to unpack his valise, he hastened to Forster's rooms.

"I have arranged the reading for Tuesday evening," said Forster, in answer to his first eager question. "Carlyle has promised to come, but Macready can not, owing to a professional engagement in Paris."

"Lay hands on him then, before he goes, and I'll treat him to an extra-special-no-charge-for-admission private bespeak. Macready of all men must hear me read!"

"I will try to find him. Your book is superb. I ran through the proofs with a friend the other night, and he began to weep like a child, until I was almost afraid to continue."

"Vait till you hears the Bellman read 'em, my Piljian's Projiss, and you'll veep yourself!"

They supped merrily with Maclise, entertained by Charles' lively account of his Italian experiences. He spent a day at the printers', correcting the proofs, and in the evening he read them to Macready, who sat on the sofa, alternately guffawing at the humor of the story and weeping at its pathos.

"What a thing it is to have power!" Charles said to Forster, when the actor left them.

The reading next afternoon was another triumph. Two of his little audience sobbed, and at the end Carlyle offered grave congratulations. Charles' hand trembled with pride when, in a letter to Genoa, he described the effect of his story, and told the sisters that Richard Barham, the parson author of the *Ingoldsby Legends*, had begged for another reading to be arranged.

"Vot price the Sparkler on the boards?" he chuckled to Forster, as they walked back to the hotel after the last reading. "Did you hear old Barham laugh? Did you see poor old Stanfield pipin' his eye and a-turnin' on of his vaterworks? I tell you, my Jungle Mammoth, I could make a fortune by reading my books in public."

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"Stuff and nonsense! Do be serious, Charles! You know that you would never dream of lowering yourself to the level of a paid public entertainer."

"I'm joking, of course," was the reluctant reply. "But honest now, ain't I a fust-rate actor? V'y, oh v'y, don't vee start a company for private theatricals? I'd stage-manage and act as well. I used to do a heap of it, years ago. I'd knock the Crummleses cold."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CHARLES returned to Genoa to celebrate Christmas with his family. Waiting only long enough to hear from Forster that the *Chimes* was selling well, he told Kate to pack for a short trip to Rome and Sicily. She was surprised to discover that he intended her to be his only companion; Georgina was to stay behind in charge of the children.

They set off with the courier along the coast, through Rapallo, Spezia and Carrara. At the last town they visited the theater, and Charles, whose fame had been spread by an English acquaintance, was gratified to find the building illuminated in his honor. Not all the journey was so pleasant. Between Pisa and Rome a tempest overtook them in the mountains; Kate was advised to descend from the swaying carriage, and tramped miserably after it through the rain, holding her sodden skirts out of the mud.

Charles was disappointed with Rome. He sought to explain this by the bad weather, the conventional shops and hotels, the prosaic dress of the inhabitants; but these were not the real cause. A letter from Georgina cheered him; he read her ardent wish to join him, and reproached himself for leaving her behind in Genoa. He wrote to her, therefore, to hurry to Naples by the first boat, and timed his arrival there to coincide with hers.

Yet even the pleasure of seeing her again could not make him like Naples. The weather continued so stormy that the crossing to Sicily had to be abandoned; he decided to make a night ascent of Vesuvius before his return to Rome, insisting that Kate and Georgina should accompany him.

They set out toward sunset on horseback, with twenty guides and porters, and rode up the mountain to the snow-line, where they dismounted. Charles, leaning on a stout

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stick, joined the guides; the sisters were carried in chairs slung on poles over the porters' shoulders. The men slipped and stumbled on the hard snow, and Kate vainly begged her husband to abandon the rest of the climb. She and Georgina had soon to leave their litters and struggle on foot after the others. The red glare of the volcano, reflected in the sky, made the night more dreadful. Every few minutes they halted to ascertain that no member of the party had missed the way or fallen into a crevice.

They reached a peak at last, and Charles, venturing through the sulphurous air to the brink of the crater, gazed awestruck into the glowing pit of Vesuvius. Kate sat down to await his return, her dress and boots torn by jagged stones, every bone in her body aching. Overwrought, she screamed with terror when he reappeared, breathless but jubilant, with his clothes smoldering from the red-hot cinders.

The descent proved worst of all. They walked in file, linking hands lest they lose their footing on the steep mountainside. The only path to safety was by shallow steps, invisible in the darkness, which the guides cut in the ice.

Suddenly a piercing shriek rent Kate's ears; and a man hurtled past her down the icy slope. Before she realized what had happened, two more of the little party had followed him, rolling with a sickening crash out of sight.

"Charles!" she cried, and his answering shout, high-pitched with excitement, assured her that he was still safe.

Her trembling limbs collapsed. Faint with horror and fear, she suffered herself to be alternately dragged and carried down the slope. She lived an eternity before they reached the shelter of a hut, and were out of danger. There a further shock awaited her, for a Frenchman, a member of another expedition, lay in agony from a serious accident.

A search-party brought in the first guide whose fall Kate had witnessed; he was insensible, but his comrades insisted that no bones were broken. Half an hour later the second, a boy, was carried to the hut, bleeding from a severe head-wound. The third victim, however, could not be found by the anxious searchers.

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At midnight Charles refused to wait any longer. His nervous exhilaration had evaporated, and he summoned the sisters to ride back to their hotel. Kate waited for him to deplore the dangers to which his rash folly had exposed them; but his only reference to the misfortunes of the night was that, except for a scratch on one hand and a trifling stiffness, he felt no worse for the climb; and he boasted that their exploit would be the talk of the town.

They returned to Rome. Kate's Scottish upbringing gave her little sympathy with the ancient and elaborate Holy Week ritual, but even she was shocked by Charles' unconcealed scorn.

When they returned from witnessing the ceremonial representation of the Last Supper, he said to her, "Did you see old Saint Peter a-wolfing his wittles like a good 'un? He collared the best seat too, at the top of the table. And vosn't 'Is 'Oliness dee-lighted v'en they finished? Oh, no; of course not. Certainly not."

Georgina laughed loudly, showing her uneven teeth and gums, but Kate did not smile.

"I suppose it means a great deal to Roman Catholics," she commented quietly.

"Hark at her, Georgy!" Charles cried. "She'll be climbing on her knees up the Holy Staircase next, helping herself along with an umbrella. Just see if she don't!"

"It is you, rather than I, Charles," Kate retorted, "who are likely to turn Catholic. Have you forgotten what the ghost told you in your dream at Genoa?"

"That's not a matter to jest about," he snapped, and, turning deliberately away, devoted his attention to Georgina.

Before they went back to Genoa, Kate was horrified one morning when he rose at dawn, threw on his clothes and hurried off to a public execution. Such was his eagerness that he arrived at the guillotine long in advance of the appointed time, and waited for hours before the grim act was completed. After the knife fell, he pushed his way through the crowd to the foot of the scaffold and stood peering at the body.

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He described every detail to the sisters, and Kate, covering her ears with her hands, marveled that he should so relish what he declared to be a barbarous and degrading spectacle. His taste for the gruesome and abnormal had ever perplexed her. Though in his writings he pleaded for humanity and loving-kindness, he was fascinated by prisons, asylums and executions.

Kate knew that she would bear another child in the autumn, and began to prepare for the return to London.

When the day of departure approached, her husband retreated to a room in a neighboring house, leaving all the packing to her and Georgina. They journeyed homeward through Brussels. There Forster and Maclise met them for a week's holiday, during which they arranged to form an amateur theatrical company in the autumn.

As soon as Charles established himself again in his study at Devonshire Terrace, he meditated the foundation of a new periodical.

"I'm certain it'll go, Kate," he said. "I'll fill it with my *Carol* philosophy—any amount of manly cheerfulness; duty to wife and family; faith in the better nature of even the poorest of our fellow creatures, and a flaming show-up of cant and humbug!"

"How often would you publish it?"

"Every week. I shan't print any names except my own; and it needn't cost more than three-ha' pence."

"But you know how you hate the worry of a weekly paper."

"Leave that to me, my dear! I've got the title, *The Cricket*. You see the notion? I shall be the cricket on everybody's hearth, chirp, chirp, chirping until I chirp the circulation up to hundreds of thousands."

Kate saw that her warning was unheeded.

"Have you consulted Mr. Forster?" she asked.

"Not yet, but he'll be enthusiastic."

Forster, however, broached an even more ambitious enterprise. During Charles' absence abroad, Bradbury and Evans had made up their minds to carry out their project of a new

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Liberal newspaper, the *Daily News*, and had sounded Forster about Charles' assuming the editorship.

"I'm willing," Charles declared, when his friend explained the position. "A daily paper will give me a far better platform than a weekly. I'll print my travel sketches in it too, and I can still use the cricket notion for a Christmas book."

"That is very well," replied Forster, "but we have to consider whether the conduct of a daily newspaper would not try you high. Are you the right man for it?"

"Who better?" cried Charles. "Where's your memory, my Bouncing Banyan? Wasn't I the best reporter on the *Chronicle*, and the outstanding shorthand-writer in the Gallery?"

"There is no need to fly out at me. If you feel confident of yourself, I am ready to arrange anything that you wish with Evans."

"Tell him to hurry on his plans, then. I'll edit his paper for him. But make it plain that I'm not giving him my name and experience for nothing. He's got to stump up handsome, he has. You can add that he must consult me about everything—the look of the paper, the appointment of the staff, everything except the mere printing."

Forster returned with a message that Evans agreed to all Charles' conditions and offered him a salary of two thousand pounds a year. He sent back an immediate acceptance, and began to plan the newspaper, which was to appear in the following January, five months ahead. He saw the *Daily News*—inspired by his ideas, his brilliance and the luster of his fame—instantly achieving a world-wide circulation.

He was not less happy about the amateur theatricals. He read dozens of plays, and finally chose Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* because he pictured himself excelling in the part of Captain Bobadill, a ranting, cowardly swash-buckler. He summoned Forster and Maclise to a conference.

They brought with them a stout, jovial young man with a booming laugh, whom Forster introduced as Mark Lemon.

"The Mr. Lemon of *Punch*?" asked Charles.

"That's me," said the stranger. "Proud to meet you, Mr.

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Dickens, though it's not the first time we've run across one another."

"I don't recall you," said Charles.

"He wouldn't," roared Lemon, winking at the others. "Bless my soul, he wouldn't, ha-ha-ha! Ever go to the 'Shakespeare's Head,' off the Strand, Mr. Dickens?"

"I used to dine there sometimes, years ago."

"Ever give an eye to the landlord? A young feller who sang songs for the customers?"

"'Pon my word," cried Charles, staring, "that wasn't you?"

"Wasn't it though, ha-ha-ha? Wasn't it just? I've come down in the world. I used to keep an honest tavern, but now I'm only a scribbler."

"My dear Lemon, you're a man after my own heart. I've laughed myself silly before now at your songs. If you can't help me to show these miserable writing chaps how to act, I'd like to know who can."

"We'll show 'em," laughed Lemon.

"You shall play Brainworm, with a different disguise in every scene, my Andalusian Fruit. I've been wondering who was competent to fill the part, except myself, and I'm booked for Bobadill."

This acquisition to the cast encouraged Charles. He divided his time between the seaside, where Kate and Georgina had taken the children, the rehearsals, and his preparations for the *Daily News*.

Kate could not bring herself to regret his frequent absences in London. During the past twelve months, at Genoa and on their travels he had been with her almost continuously; he had written nothing except *The Chimes* and a few notes for his travel sketches; his friends had not been at hand to absorb his leisure. She was exhausted by his demands on her. Only now would she be able to enjoy the repose which she had vainly promised herself in Italy.

He threw himself into the character of Captain Bobadill. Nor did he limit his impersonation of this redoubtable braggart to rehearsals; he lived the part always, speaking no

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language but the captain's, elaborating its rant into one of those protracted jokes which he relished. On his visits to Broadstairs he instructed the children to address him as "Captain Bob," and inflicted ceaseless Bobadill on every member of the family. The children loved this, for youth can bear the monotony of repetition. Georgina applauded, for he could do no wrong.

Only Kate found it unendurable. Her impatience troubled her sensitive conscience. She often criticized her husband in her heart and, with increasing doubt, asked herself if she had grown out of sympathy with him—even, perhaps, out of her old unquestioning love for him. He too, she felt, hardly seemed to care whether she approved of him, so long as Georgina and his cronies courted, admired, adored him.

She was so near her confinement that she did not accompany Georgina to London for the first performance of the play. Her sister returned with Charles on the evening of the following day.

"By the foot of Pharaoh!" he roared, throwing down his hat, kissing Kate and pulling Charley's ear, all before he had taken two steps across the threshold of their lodgings. "'Twas a veritable triumph, as I am Captain Bobadill, a gentleman and a soldier. Body o' me, how they did laugh when this poor gentleman-like carcass mounted great oaths and mighty pronunciamientos across the footlights! Marry come up, 'twas a night of nights, by Saint George and my halidom!"

"I'm delighted to hear it, dear," said Kate. "But please don't talk so loud—Mamie isn't very well."

"Heyday, must I then put off my brawling?" continued Charles, rather less noisily. "I love few words, but I will give you tidings of our gambols, nor take denial."

"Have your supper first," she suggested. "I've kept it hot for you."

"Body o' Cæsar, what's supper to glory? 'Twas the noblest night that ever mine eyes beheld, since I led the captains at the leaguering of the Genoways!—What a shame you couldn't be there, Kate. Cattermole Kittenmole like a

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good 'un. Forster and Lemon backed me up splendidly, didn't they, Georgy?"

"But you were far the best, Charles."

"By this hand, wife, hear'st thou the damsel's words? As I am a valorous warrior, her speech is purest sooth. By Hieronymo, how the fair ones did cheer whene'er I confronted them! Forster shouted his lines like the most peremptory clown of Christendom; odso, I did exhort him to abate his bellowing and assume a more sweet, comely, gentleman-like conversation. Alack and well-a-day, he heeded me not. But I out-shouted him, yea, by the foot of Pharaoh, yea, by Saint George, yea, as I am a soldier and a most consummate actor!"

Kate led him, still Bobadilling, to his supper. She did not hope to divert him from his jest, so long as Georgina applauded him.

Soon the whole family returned to Devonshire Terrace, where Kate bore her sixth child and fourth son.

Charles would have liked to escape the domestic inconvenience of her confinement by a visit to Brighton or a short journey abroad. For another reason too he would have welcomed a change of scene. *The Cricket* was developing into a Christmas book with vexatious slowness; the creative mood in which he had dashed off *The Chimes* eluded him, and he sighed for a new environment.

Kate observed his impatience with her illness, and a spark of innocent satisfaction flickered in her mind that he was tied to London by the necessity of daily visits to the *Daily News* office in Fleet Street.

Forster still hinted that he did not think Charles fitted, physically or temperamentally, to his new duties; but these objections made Charles only more stubborn in toiling at an enterprise in which, though he concealed it from himself, his enthusiasm was already dying.

Long, laborious weeks passed. He struggled to the end of the Christmas book, entitled it *The Cricket on the Hearth*, and sent it to the printers in the belief that it was a sorry successor to *The Chimes*. He wrote a prospectus for the

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Daily News, heralding it as "a journal conducted without personal partiality or political rancour, devoted to enlightenment, liberty and education"; arranged his travel sketches of Italy for serial appearance in its first issues; engaged reporters; persuaded friends to promise contributions; assisted at the ceremonial christening of new machinery; endeavored to impress his personality on every department of the venture.

Stern Bradbury and smiling Evans did all in their power to encourage him. They carried out every suggestion which was feasible, and tactfully dissuaded him from mistaken notions. They agreed to his demand that the reporters should be paid higher salaries than were customary, that his father should be engaged as head of the reporting staff, that minor posts should be found for his brothers Frederick and Augustus and for his uncle, John Barrow, whose *Mirror of Parliament* had recently failed, that his former editor on the *True Sun* should be employed, and that Kate's father should act as dramatic and musical critic.

These foretastes of power—how grand it was to be able to patronize three of his former editors!—restored Charles' good humor, and confirmed his picture of himself as the tribune of his countrymen, the champion of the poor and downtrodden, the literary and artistic arbiter of Europe, the interpreter of Liberal England to an attentive world. Cant, hypocrisy and humbug were already trembling in their strongholds!

There had never been a more auspicious moment for the foundation of such a newspaper. The Liberal tide was again rising. The fourteen years since the Reform Bill had seen the extravagant hopes of the Reformers disappointed: Lord Melbourne, the Whig Premier, had proved himself merely a mild conservative, and the Tory Governments, which alternated with his, pursued a barely distinguishable policy.

Peel, the Tory Prime Minister, was in disgrace with all classes. He had offended the rich by his reorganization of the Bank of England; the middle classes groaned under his ruinous income tax of sevenpence in the pound; working men

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were inflamed by the Chartists and by the Anti Corn-Law League, which, armed with the persuasive logic of Cobden and the Scriptural eloquence of Bright, clamored for the universal panacea of Free Trade.

Huge developments in industry had brought more mouths into being than could be fed; and dear food, low wages and scanty work bred discontent. Never had unrest, poverty and crime so troubled the land.

The potato harvest in Ireland failed, and that island, too, seethed with disaffection, refusing to be placated either by Royal Commissions or by increased grants to Roman Catholic colleges.

Peel, ever willing to adapt his views to altered circumstances, argued that only cheap corn could prevent a disastrous famine, and endeavored to convert his followers to the necessity of abolishing the protective Corn Laws. Two among his disgruntled supporters, however, Lord George Bentinck and Disraeli, raised the cry that he was betraying the faithful Tory farmer, and lashed their Party from sullen criticism to open rebellion.

The Liberals, seeing their foes divided, prepared to take office, and the *Daily News* was to appear on the eve of the decisive session of Parliament.

Charles had received the first accounts of *The Cricket's* sales from Bradbury and Evans, and discovered that it had doubled the circulation of the *Carol* and *The Chimes*. It was the first book this firm had published on his behalf. Clearly, they knew their business, and would make the *Daily News* sell as satisfactorily as *The Cricket*. Confident of success, he threw all his energy into the preparations for the paper's appearance.

Kate's first intimation that the *Daily News* was at last on sale came when Charles burst into their bedroom at three in the morning and thrust a copy into her hand. Stuttering with excitement,—for, in moments of stress, his tongue still seemed to swell and choke his utterance,—he described to her the incidents of the night.

"What a go!" he cried. "Talk of confusion and turmoil!

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Our dispatch from Paris never arrived, and we've gone to press without it. One of the printing-machines has broken down, and heaven knows what delay there is. I was driven to distraction by incredible demands upon me. Everything was thrown on my shoulders; everything depended on me.

"I says to myself, says I, 'Now, Mark Tapley, young feller, now's your time to come out strong!' And didn't I come out strong? Oh, no, certainly not! I was everywhere—deciding what should go in and what shouldn't, helping father to serve up the reports, encouraging Evans to be calm, checking Bradbury's disposition to interfere, taking misprints out of my manifesto and my travel sketch, throwing a cheery word to the compositors, dashing up to the proof-readers, down once more to my office, across the passage to Evans, back again to father, and along to the compositors again! Talk about coming out strong—why, Hercules was a kitten to the Inimitable Boz to-night!"

"And is everything right at last, dear?"

"As right as I can make it!"

"You must be dreadfully tired."

"Oh, but that wasn't all! When I'd seen the last piece of type set and the last page go to press, I sent a boy out for beer and, standing on a table in the compositors' room, with every one round me, I made a speech. I thanked 'em for what they'd done, invited 'em one and all to drink jolly good luck to the *Daily News*, and, to show that I was speaking from my heart, I told 'em that nobody appreciated manly industry more than I, for I had won my way up to fame through stony-hearted London. When I closed with a reference to *Carol* philosophy and, raising my glass, cried, 'God bless Us, Every One!'—lord, how they wept and cheered!"

Very soon, however, Kate saw his elation vanish. Bradbury enraged him by criticizing him to one of his subordinates, and by instructing the cashiers to refuse payment to a reporter whom Charles had engaged. He felt his dignity affronted. He, Charles Dickens, to be overruled by a mere printer!

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He tried to conceal his chagrin from Kate, but she learned the truth from his father, who, looking ten years younger and happier in his new position, bought a supply of presents for his grandchildren with the first check of his salary.

"The dear boy has not quite the essential proportion of *modus* in his *rebus*," said John reflectively. "You are familiar, my dear Kate, with the apologue of the nimble rodent and the persevering reptile. Charles possesses too many of the qualities of the hare and too few of the tortoise. He does not exhibit the boundless patience and unruffled nerves which I have always regarded as the essential desideratum of an editor."

"I was afraid the routine would be too much for him."

"When Mr. Bradbury, a fine old English gentleman and a generous proprietor, ventures to offer him a word of advice, Charles, to use a vulgar metaphor, snaps his head off. My son is also superlatively reluctant to delegate even a mustard-seed of responsibility. He seeks to be everything at once, which, as you are probably aware, was a source of considerable domestic infelicity to the wife of that bald but brilliant hero of antiquity, Julius Cæsar."

"Charles will get into the ways of the office," Kate urged loyally. "Isn't he very popular with everybody?"

"Popularity may sell a paper, my dear, but it does not achieve the indispensable preliminary of producing it. However much the staff admires Charles' writing, I am afraid that their respect for his editorial capacity is already, to use a poetical expression, over the hills and far away."

Soon Charles could no longer deceive himself. One petty incident after another showed him that, though he was nominally editor, the control of the paper was slipping from his hands. If he hesitated to make a decision, the problem was solved behind his back. If he decided too quickly, his rash orders were countermanded. Unaccustomed to the strain of night work, he could not give his best at the hours when it was most needed. His staff treated him with courtesy, but he read disillusion in their eyes, and the consciousness of failure fell on him like a blow.

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His only desire was to escape. Ten days after the first issue, he summoned Forster to the office.

"My health won't stand this strain," he declared. "If I am to carry on the great work to which Providence has called me, I must be free of this intolerable bondage to the desk. Besides, I don't like the way Bradbury treats father."

Forster shrugged his shoulders. At times Charles tried his patience severely. "What did I tell you?" he said.

"Ah, but I saw a chance to strike a smashing blow for my fellow men, and I succumbed to the temptation. I know now that I can do this only at the expense of the talents which I hold in trust."

"I am glad that you have found this out so quickly. What do you propose to do?"

"Find a successor," replied Charles airily.

"Have you any one in mind?"

"Yes, a most excellent, dependable, good-hearted, manly fellow, one of the salt of the earth. His name is—John Forster."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exploded Forster. "Of all the——"

"For my sake, Forster! I implore you. I am certain that Evans will never consent to part with me, unless I provide an acceptable substitute."

"But why should I have to change my whole life, and give up all my other interests?"

"If I stay here," Charles explained, "the burden will destroy me. I shall never be able to write another book."

"I must have time to consider."

"You're weakening, my Nabob—confess it! I count on you, and you alone, to rescue me from the damnable 'Daily Nuisance.'"

For an hour Charles pleaded, and Forster demurred. Gradually his objections dwindled to grumbles, his frown melted to a resigned smile, and he reluctantly agreed to sound the proprietors on the change.

At once the *Daily News* and all its interests sank into the back of Charles' mind. He reduced his hours of attendance

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at the office, and celebrated his birthday by a week-end trip with Kate, Georgina and Maclise to Rochester, where Forster joined them with the tidings that neither Bradbury nor Evans objected to the proposed change.

Charles' satisfaction was tempered by the knowledge that his departure had aroused no protests. His first act on returning to London was to dispatch a formal letter of resignation; he undertook, however, to continue the publication of his travel sketches and to send occasional contributions on social problems. Thus, after only seventeen days of authority and nearly as many weeks of proud anticipation, his editorship of the *Daily News* ceased.

He sought to restore his self-esteem by sketching the outline of a new book, but, whenever he sat at his desk in Devonshire Terrace, the phantoms of *Chuzzlewit* and the *Daily News* taunted him with failure.

He initiated a quarrel with Bradbury, who had taken Hall's old place in his mind as whipping-boy, about the amount of remuneration for his occasional articles, and the abrupt dismissal from the paper of his brother Fred; he refused to attend any meeting at the *Daily News* office if Bradbury were present.

His mind turned to desperate projects. He talked to Kate of emigration to the Colonies, of solitary retreat to the Continent, of a long sea voyage, of a journey to the East.

He even wrote to one of the Liberal leaders, and inquired whether he could hope to be appointed a London magistrate. The reply was polite but unfavorable, and Charles saw in it another proof of his fall.

"I shan't be able to work, Kate, until I go foreigneering again," he announced one evening at dinner, when Forster was snatching an hour from Fleet Street in their company. "So far as I know, the family oracle don't impose no veto."

"Not at all," said Forster. "I know that a journey abroad would benefit you. What is your opinion, Mrs. Dickens?"

"If you think it will do Charles good, Mr. Forster," Kate answered wearily. Weeks of packing, unpacking, repacking and hurried travel rose before her.

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"And you, Georgy?" asked Charles.

"Whatever you think best, Charles. Where do you mean us to go?"

"Switzerland," he answered, with a wave of his hand. "The glimpse I caught of the Alps last year has made me long for 'em ever since. Wouldn't you like to go to Switzerland, Georgy? Ah, I can see by your eager little face that you would."

"Must we start soon?" Kate asked.

The contrast between her tone and her sister's excitement galled him.

"Just as soon as we can find a tenant for this house," he replied gruffly.

"You can well understand Charles' wish to shut the whole unfortunate episode of the *Daily News* from his mind, Mrs. Dickens," said Forster, explaining what Charles would rather have left unspoken. "Besides, he needs refreshment and tranquillity for his new book."

Kate understood from earlier experience that protest would not deflect his purpose, and would only expose her to the worse side of his temper. She began to arrange the house for a tenant, and prepared herself and her six children for their travels.

At the end of May, after a farewell dinner in Forster's rooms, Charles set out with his family for Lausanne. Their way led up the Rhine. As Kate stood on the deck of the boat, watching Mayence disappear round a bend in the river, a German approached her.

"I haf in the newspaper read," he said with a ceremonious bow, "that the great English writer, Herr Dickens, travels just now on our dear green German Rhine. I ask, pleas', if you haf seen him."

"Mr. Dickens is on this boat," answered Kate. "There he is, talking to that lady."

The German clicked his heels and approached Charles and Georgina.

At dinner Charles described the encounter.

"Another of my coincidences, Kate! I made the ac-

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quaintance on deck of a perfect stranger, a German. He recognized me from my picture, I suppose. And by one of the incredible chances which Fate seems to reserve for me, he's the brother of a man to whom I have a letter of introduction."

"Isn't it extraordinary how well known Charles is in every country?" Georgina said.

"Very extraordinary," Kate agreed, smiling.

"But the joke of it, Kate," Charles continued, "was when the milingtary Prooshian turned to Georgy and said, 'May I have the honor to be presented to Mistress Dickens?'"

Her smile faded.

At Lausanne he leased a pretty villa standing in a garden, bright with roses, which dropped to the very shore of the lake. Its cheapness pleased him as much as its convenience delighted Kate. He picked a bedroom on the first floor for his study, while a pavilion in the garden offered him an alternative workroom.

Kate found Lausanne a paradise after Genoa. She discovered that housekeeping would be nearly as easy as in London. She was only ten minutes' walk away from good shops, where English-speaking tradesmen were prompt and obliging. The grocer stocked familiar wares; and the butcher did not press horse-flesh or goat upon the cook. Best of all, the children quickly made friends with other little English visitors.

Charles was enchanted with the neat little town and the surrounding country, which he explored with Georgina. He had a congenial idea for a Christmas book—the love of two sisters for the same man!—and was searching also for a group of eccentric characters round whom to build a new novel.

He made no attempt at serious work, however, nor did Kate urge him to his desk. He visited the local prison and an institute for the blind, where a ten-year-old girl, a congenitally blind deaf-mute, fascinated him by the contrast between her pretty face and the complete blank of her mind.

Despite these distractions, he forced himself at last to

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begin his new novel, on a theme suggested to him at Genoa by his Spanish neighbor's passion for an heir. He designed to place him in an English setting and to demonstrate the evil consequences of pride, just as in *Chuzzlewit* he had denounced selfishness. As the title he chose *Dombey and Son*.

On the eve of its formal beginning, he brought a copy of *Tristram Shandy* to the sisters.

"Let us consult an oracle concerning *Dombey*," he said. "I'll open *Tristram Shandy* and place my thumb on a page. The passage on which it rests, will prophesy *Dombey's* fate."

"Let me blindfold you," laughed Georgina, "so that you can't play a joke on us by turning up a place you know."

With mock gravity he submitted, and opened the volume, setting his thumb on a page.

"Read the sentence to me, Georgy!" he commanded.

"What a work it is likely to turn out. Let us begin it!" she read over his shoulder.

"Good God!" exclaimed Charles, tearing the handkerchief from his eyes. "Another coincidence! Isn't it amazing, Kate?"

"Yes, indeed," said Kate soberly. "I do hope *Dombey* justifies it."

He expected to be able to start *Dombey* easily, but his invention limped, though he applied himself conscientiously to his task. He turned impatiently to his Christmas book, and to a version of the Gospel which he was preparing for his children.

His slow progress reawakened the fear that his genius was failing him. Petulant reproaches of Kate alternated with self-pitying conversations with Georgina. His worst mood succeeded his best.

He missed Forster's helpful criticism, and unburdened himself by posting long descriptions of his difficulties. Grimly intent on completing the first installment of *Dombey*, he developed a habit of rushing to the mirror and grimacing till he captured the right words to describe his character's expression. Even so, he advanced slowly.

The fourth chapter was especially irksome, but he finished

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it at last one hot afternoon in July. With a gasp of relief he flung down his pen. The sheets were scored and blotted with corrections; poor old Forster would never be able to read them until they were set up in type.

He looked through the window, and saw Kate asleep in a garden chair by the pavilion. Gathering up his manuscript, he went out to her.

"Yes, dear?" she said drowsily, waking at his step.

"I've finished it," he said. "Where's Georgy? I want you both to tell me if the prophecy's coming true."

"She's gone for a walk with the children and Nurse."

"Shall I read it to you alone, then?"

"I'd love to hear it, darling. Fetch a chair and sit beside me!"

"No, I can do myself more justice standing up."

He began to read, his eyes aflame with enthusiasm, gesticulating with his left hand. He threw back his head with a characteristic jerk; his features took on an eager boyish expression.

Kate gazed at him, scarcely heeding the words he uttered. This was the man she loved. By some trick of voice and manner, he had annihilated all the years since their first meeting. The stout, rosy little woman was once more the grave-eyed girl whom he had kissed in her father's drawing-room; the prematurely middle-aged man, with his grizzled temples and lined mouth, was the impetuous lad who, in the first moment of success, had come courting his editor's daughter.

He read on, oblivious of the storm in her heart, intent only on his sentences and their excellence. He finished the last page and pocketed the sheaf of papers.

"Well?" he asked.

"I love it, Charles! It's beautiful, finer than anything else you've ever written!"

"Hurrah! It must be good to win such praise from you."

She sighed, and he looked at her sharply.

"What's the matter, Kate? Are you faint?"

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"It's nothing, dear. Your reading brought back the days when—when we were married."

She rose and Charles, alarmed, hurried to her side.

"Charles, can't we find a way?—I'm so weary——" She stopped, her mouth trembling, one hand clutching at her dress. "It's useless. I can't tell you."

She turned abruptly, ran into the house and locked herself in their bedroom.

He stood beside her chair, motionless and dejected. Sensitive from the exaltation of his reading, he knew that for an instant they had come near together, that the cloud of estrangement had almost lifted. If only she had not run away! If only she had given him an opportunity to understand what it was in her that kept them apart!

But the moment was past. The cloud had thickened and nothing could dispel it.

When Georgina returned, they were both silent and miserable, and she suspected another quarrel. She asked Charles to read her the four chapters of *Dombey*, and he grieved her by replying that he had already dispatched them to London.

Kate dreaded now to be alone with him. Perhaps her half-confession of the shattered happiness of their marriage had vexed him. Worse, he might jest of it. The thought was unbearable. She went to bed early each evening, in order that she might be asleep, or at least feign sleep, when he joined her. She threw Georgina into his company, avoiding them both by spending more time with the children.

Mamie and Katey, she discovered, were excited at the preparations for a wedding at the neighboring farm, to which the farmer insisted on her coming to bless the bride.

"So happy a couple as you and your husband, madam," the man told Kate, "can not but bring her good luck."

The bride was a stalwart, flaxen-haired peasant, dressed in black. Charles laid his hand on her head, kissed her, laughed, and recited a few pleasant sentiments. She held out her hand to Kate who, pale and trembling, tried to speak.

No word came. Kate faltered, swayed from side to side, and collapsed in a swoon.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"THAT mealy-mouthed old file, Johnny Milton, veren't no man of business, as little Hall's forebear ree-marked v'en he give him five p'un'—all at vunce—for *Paradise Lost*. How much has the Inimitable pocketed these six months for *Dombey* alone, my Mammoth?"

"Well over two thousand pounds," replied Forster, "and well you deserve every penny of it!"

"Seeing as how the message of *Dombey* is a smack in the eye for Mammon, I think that gen'l'man's being werry considerate."

"It is also a tract against pride, remember," smiled Forster.

"Oh, I ain't proud, my Panjandarum. But two whacking successes—*Dombey* and the *Battle of Life*—vun on top of t'other, do fill a wessel with joyfulness. The Inimitable Boz is the Immortal Boz now, me boy; all he vants is his Bozvell."

"He sits before you, my dear Dickens," replied his friend. "I charge myself with your biography, in the unlikely event of your pre-deceasing me. And that reminds me. A man whom I met a few months ago told me a preposterous story about you."

"Vot did he have the owdashity to say?"

"It was something about a shop. No, not a shop; he spoke of you in connection with a warehouse or a factory. I have it—a blacking factory."

Charles rose from his desk and strode to the window. He had thought himself secure, as year after year went by without discovery. He was thirty-five now; twenty-three years had passed since he left the warehouse in Chandos Street. Never once had he alluded to it; his parents had promised not to betray him. Even Kate had never suspected.

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And now Forster, by some colossal mischance, had stumbled upon his traces!

"You have touched a chord in my memory which I hoped was never to vibrate again," he said, after a long silence. "I can't tell you about it now. Even after all this time it is too painful. Perhaps some day I may bring myself to open my heart to you."

What was to be done? If he kept silent, Forster, his future Boswell, would question the man who had set him on the track and, between them, the whole horrible story might be revealed. People would marvel that Charles Dickens had been forced to go to work as a child; and then his father's imprisonment in the Marshalsea would be known.

What an opportunity for the cynics! They would sneer at the contradiction between his denunciations of snobbery and his concealment of the unsavory episodes of his own boyhood. He knew, of course, that his only reasons for silence had been the anguish which every thought of the factory caused him, and his desire to save Kate pain. But he could not hope that the damnable scoundrels who already pursued him with their scurrility, especially in America, would accept this explanation.

It would be folly to say nothing to Forster. The alternative was to tell him everything. But Charles shrank from confessing the truth, even to his closest friend. He would almost as soon have told Kate!

For weeks the dilemma racked him. After long and bitter consideration, he decided that boldness was the more prudent policy. Better to share his secret with Forster, than expose it to discovery by a mocking world. Besides, if Forster was to write a biography worthy of its hero, he ought to understand how vast were the obstacles which Charles had overcome, how stupendous his rise from obscure poverty to fame and wealth.

He beat down his misgivings and, half-ashamed, half-defiant, swore Forster to secrecy and imparted to him a summary of his childhood, darkening the shadows and exaggerating the length of his service in the factory.

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This conversation moved him to write an account of his life, which he designed his biographer to discover among his papers after his death. He worked at it steadily, recapturing dim memories of his boyhood at Portsmouth, his school-days at Chatham, his love for little Lucy Stroughill, his walk with his father to Gad's Hill, his journey to London, the squalor of Bayham Street and the Marshalsea, his agony in the factory, the transient prosperity of his second school-days, the joyless interlude in Blackmore's office, and his apprenticeship to journalism and literature.

He reached the episode of his love for Maria Beadnell and, as he wrote her name, his thoughts wandered into a channel where they had never before dared to stray. How poignant were the emotions which she had inspired in him! How tragic his estrangement from the woman whom he had married! If Maria had not jilted him, would he ever have fancied himself in love with Kate? If they had not quarreled, could he not have used the triumph of *Pickwick* to win the consent of Maria's parents to their marriage? Suppose Maria had been by his side through all these years, his wife and the mother of his children!

He had no heart to continue. His love for Maria was too strong, too sacred for description. He tore the pages into fragments and burned them. Even while he gazed, weeping, at the ashes, he wished that he had not been so hasty.

These incidents of his youth could supply the background, even the main framework, for a novel. How full his life had been of manly endeavor, romantic contrast, and human sentiment! How tangled the skein of fame, happiness and misfortune! Forster had long advised him to write a story in the first person; here was the ideal material.

Thus the germ of *David Copperfield* took root in his mind. The story developed more easily than any of its predecessors. He incorporated in it recollections of his boyhood, though under impenetrable disguise, endowing his hero with all the qualities which he imagined himself to possess. He transferred his birthplace to Suffolk; the blacking factory became a wine warehouse.

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Convinced that he had been wickedly neglected by his parents, yet unable to cast John for such a rôle, he made his hero a posthumous child and endowed Micawber, one of his usual eccentrics, with a travesty of a side of John's nature.

Only Forster and his father could guess that *Copperfield* was in any degree autobiographical, and even they would not know that Dora, David's child-wife, was a glorification of Maria.

Forster, however, pointed out that David Copperfield's initials were Charles' transposed.

"D. C. backwards is C. D.," Charles explained excitedly to Kate and Georgina. "Isn't that absolutely uncanny? Don't the most remarkable coincidences happen to me?"

"I've discovered some more coincidences," laughed Kate, after a few minutes' thought. "The initials of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, turned round, are those of Captain Marryat. The *Battle of Life* makes Lytton Bulwer, and *Barnaby Rudge* is Robert Browning. Isn't that odd?"

"I don't admire your wit, Kate," he snapped. "I suppose it's Scottish humor, if there is such a thing. Your parents may enjoy it, but you'll oblige me by repressing it in this house."

Georgina restored his good temper by inquiring how the latest instalment of *Copperfield* had sold. Its sales exceeded even those of *Dombey*, and proved to Charles that he had recovered—nay, immeasurably strengthened—his hold on the public.

He returned, therefore, to the project for a weekly paper in partnership with Bradbury and Evans, in which his own writings were to be eked out with anonymous contributions by other hands. He first proposed to call the paper "Charles Dickens, conducted by Himself," but, on Forster's advice, he finally decided upon *Household Words*.

The immediate success of the new publication erased from his mind his failure at the *Daily News*. All financial anxieties disappeared. With reasonable care, he need not fear to suffer again even so minor a reverse as *Chuzzlewit*, and nothing could shake his position as the world's favorite writer.

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He began to look at life through a rich man's spectacles. When, for example, the time came for Charley to go to school, his father, forgetting his definition of education as "a broad system of moral and intellectual philosophy," sent him to—Eton. A similar slip of memory made him overlook his own application for a magistracy, and denounce in *Copperfield* the appointment of these officials as dependent on favoritism and jobbery.

Kate shared in the material advantages of her husband's prosperity. He no longer urged economy on her or reproached her with extravagance; she did not need to fret over a household budget which his whims constantly upset.

The triumph of *Dombey* and *Copperfield* coincided with the arrival of two more sons, and now, pregnant for the third time in less than four years, she watched the circulation of *Household Words* swell as she prepared for the birth of her ninth child.

When the confinement approached, Georgina took the children to Broadstairs for their summer holiday. Kate remained at Devonshire Terrace; her health was poor and the doctor would not sanction a journey.

The monthly instalments of *Copperfield* and the weekly labors of *Household Words* engrossed Charles, and the strain made him restless. A fortnight before Kate expected her baby, he dashed to Paris in search of quiet and inspiration. He felt no uneasiness at leaving her, for she had her mother and Mrs. Dickens at call, while John could deal with any emergency.

He was back in London for the birth, which proved difficult and dangerous. Weakened by its complications, Kate lay seriously ill, and the baby, a girl, was puny and delicate. Despite his anxiety, Charles could not long endure the discomfort of the household, and, as soon as he knew his wife out of danger, he joined Georgina and the children again.

On one of his editorial visits to London, he found Kate sufficiently recovered to accompany him to Broadstairs.

"I mean to get up some more acting this winter," he told her during the journey. "Bulwer Lytton wants me to go

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a-Bobadillin' down at his place at Knebworth. He's talking of a fund to aid destitute authors and painters, and I can raise money for it by theatricals."

"Have you chosen your cast yet?"

"Forster and I talked it over to-day. There'll be me and Georgy, of course, and Lemon and Forster; and I've invited Mary Boyle to play Mrs. Kiteley."

"Whom?"

"Mary Boyle, that larky girl we met last year. Don't you remember how first-rate she was in the scenes from *Nickleby* which I made up with her?"

Kate recalled the girl. She was a relative of friends of Charles, a lively, laughing young woman whom only the respectability of her family prevented from becoming a professional actress.

She and Charles had indulged in one of the mock flirtations in which he delighted—he called her his 'Meery' and himself her 'Jo'—and he kissed her good night every evening, at first to the surprise and then to the amusement of the house-party.

During her illness Kate, weary of being passed over, had made up her mind to assert herself, to rehabilitate herself in her husband's eyes. Jealousy of Mary Boyle as a candidate for Charles' affections did not cross her mind, any more than jealousy of Georgina; but why should she not take this opportunity to prove to Charles that she could share his interests as well as they?

"What part have you given me?" she asked him, with an assumption of innocence.

"You, Kate? You?—But you haven't played for years."

"You used to say that I had a good understanding of the stage," she rejoined quietly.

He stared at her in uncomfortable silence. Another objection occurred to him.

"What about the children?" he asked.

"They have their nurses."

"Your health, then? You have been very ill, you must remember."

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"The new interest will make me forget all about it." Her tone was pleasant but firm.

"Are you sure you're serious, Kate?"

"Why not?"

He frowned, fidgeting with his watch-chain.

"You can play Tib, if you like," he said grudgingly. "I meant to ask Mrs. Lemon, but, if you want to have it, you can. Still, you know, it means leaving the children."

"Don't you think, Charles," she said almost impatiently, "that I see enough of the children? What else have I done all these years?"

There was no more to be said. He resigned himself to her intrusion, and when, after a month, she brought the family back to London, rehearsals began at a private theater in Soho.

He worked with his usual intensity as producer, encouraging, scolding, explaining. To his surprise Kate was word-perfect from the first; hers was not a long part, but she was on the stage during much of the action, and no rehearsal could proceed without her. For all her eagerness she took care not to overact; and Charles found only Mary Boyle more competent and responsive to his direction.

"Meery's" amiability conquered Kate. Even the mock love-affair which Charles sedulously pursued with her, and his pose of slavish adoration, troubled his wife only by their monotony.

A family bereavement compelled the girl to retire from the cast, and Kate, encouraged by her absence, doubled her efforts to excel.

"Admirable, Kate!" he cried, when she left the stage after one of her dialogues. "That went very smoothly. If you play only half as well on the night!"

Exultant, she hurried toward the door which led from the stage to the auditorium, groping her way through dark rows of scenery.

Suddenly the floor collapsed beneath her; she stumbled, and fell heavily to the ground. She tried to rise, suppressing a cry of pain, but her foot was held fast.

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"Charles, Charles!" she screamed.

He ran to her, the rest of the company at his heels, peering into the darkness.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, bending over her.

"My foot," she moaned, as he and Lemon tried to raise her. "Don't touch me! My foot!"

Charles lifted her long skirt and saw that her foot was wedged between a trap-door and the floor.

He shouted to the carpenter to release her, and she was carried, faint with agony, to a couch which was part of the setting of the scene. Lemon ran for a doctor, while Charles stormed at the workman for leaving the trap unbolted.

The doctor declared her ankle severely sprained. Charles and Lemon supported her to a carriage and, driving home with her, carried her up to bed.

"Thank goodness it's nothing serious, Kate," said Georgina, standing by her. "The doctor says you'll be as well as ever in a week or two."

"I shan't be able to play," sobbed Kate, "and I did so, so want to."

"Never mind," said Charles, in a soothing voice. "Yours was only a small part, after all. Mary's going is much more serious."

The pain of her ankle was as nothing to her mortification. She had made herself ridiculous; her attempt to win back her husband's admiration had ended in a clumsy fiasco.

Too weak to attend the Knebworth performance, she was well enough to join a house-party after Christmas, where Charles arranged more theatricals. Kate was included, but she played without zest, for Mary Boyle was again in the cast, absorbing Charles' interest.

He put himself to great trouble over these productions, since he regarded them as experiments for a more ambitious enterprise. Bulwer's "Guild of Literature and Art" was to be launched on the world at the height of the London season by an amateur performance under Charles' direction. Bulwer undertook to write a comedy, and Charles promised a farce.

With Kate again ill in bed and the baby, Dora, still ailing,

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his invention stagnated. He went to Paris to gather ideas from a tour of the theaters, brought back a plot and strove to elaborate it. But the dialogue would not flow.

Household Words demanded his attention; he had to dictate an instalment of his *Child's History of England* for each issue; Mary Boyle sent him an article which he had offered to shape for publication; he made the arrangements for a banquet to Macready, on his retirement from the stage; and he also assumed the duty of interesting the Duke of Devonshire in the coming performance, with a view to its being held at Devonshire House, his mansion in Piccadilly, in the presence of Royalty. Kate was sent by her doctor to Malvern, and took Georgina with her; Charles' time was further occupied by the journeys to and from the country.

Amid so many distractions, his farce languished. He designed it as no ordinary comic piece; it was to be a farce with a message, and he planned to incorporate in it what he called his "*Carol philosophy*" of elevating optimism. When he had struggled uneasily to the end of the first scene, he was forced to acknowledge Bulwer his superior as a playwright, and abandoned the attempt at rivalry.

Reaching London one day from Malvern, he learned that the Queen and the Prince Consort had consented to attend the performance at Devonshire House. His joy, however, was dashed by a message that his father had undergone an operation and lay critically ill.

Charles sent word that he would hasten to John's bedside as soon as he had attended a committee on which he was engaged.

"I am inclined to conjecture, my love," said John to his wife, when Charles' note came, "that the dear boy's taste for theatrical production may be appropriate at the present juncture, inasmuch as I fear that this is destined to be positively my last appearance on any stage. Ring down the curtain, if any!"

Mrs. Dickens wept. A tender and capable nurse, she had not left John's bedside since the operation, and the long strain had exhausted her.

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"Your tears do credit to your devotion, my dear Elizabeth, but I suggest to you that this is no time for sorrow. We are instructed on unimpeachable authority that, just as in Adam all men die, so in the Established Church of England—I can not vouch for the sects—all shall be made alive again. What, I ask you, could be fairer than that?"

"Ought he to talk so much?" Mrs. Dickens asked the doctor, who appeared at the door to glance at his patient.

"Well, ma'am," was the reply, "with any one else I should say not. But your husband is exceptional; the more he talks, the more good it seems to do him."

"Precisely, my dear," John assented, as the doctor retired. "Silence has never appealed to me as a means of self-expression. I am not a Trappist. I should never have announced the discovery of the Pacific Ocean by standing silent upon a peak in Darien, like the adipose adventurer whom the poet Keats celebrated. Indeed, I suspect that Cortez held his tongue on that occasion only because, like so many other eminent military commanders, he was incapable of coherent discourse. I can see no other reason why he should wish to keep the Pacific Ocean to himself."

"How can you joke at such a time, John?"

"Because I have always been a philosopher, my own, able to take a cheerful view of everything—including philosophy. Speaking as I am, very nearly *sub judice*, I confess that I should have made you a better husband, had I been less of a philosopher and more, shall I say, up to snuff. As it is, I regret that I have been a mediocre spouse and, as a parent—**emphatically no go.**"

He waved aside her protests.

"I am aware that, all things considered, our children have not done badly. Poor Fanny, despite her devilishly pronounced religious convictions, managed to enjoy her short life. Charles, as he would be the first to agree, is a credit to us both. Our Letitia is happily married into sanitary inspection, the progressive if somewhat unidealistic vocation which Alfred also adorns. Frederick may in course of time become Governor of the Bank of England, when he will, I

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trust, become at last independent of Charles' financial assistance. As for Augustus, while I must admit that he has at times occasioned us a certain uneasiness——"

"He was always a tiresome child," Mrs. Dickens broke in, "but most lovable. Even when he caught the measles, his spots were not like other children's—or was it whooping-cough?"

"Augustus has lately informed me that he proposes to abandon his native heath—by which flight of fancy I presume that he means Marylebone—and embark upon a new life in the United States of America and Liberty. I am not in the smallest degree worried about him. Since he appears to look forward to settling in Chicago, I conclude that he has inherited no small portion of my own philosophic detachment."

"I'm sure it is all my fault that he is going away," sobbed Mrs. Dickens. "I spoiled him. I spared the rod of iron without which my cousin, Sir John, used to say that he would never have propitiated the Boers and won the esteem of eleven Chief Lords at the Admiralty. I think there were eleven, one after another, but there may have been twelve, like a baker's dozen."

"No one, my own, could be a more excellent or tender mother, or, if I may use the words without prejudice to myself, a more forgiving wife. For such rifts as have transpired in our domestic lute, I blame myself entirely, although I wonder whether our children have not, on the whole, profited by what must be described as an unconventional upbringing. Charles, I am positive, owes no small portion of his genius to the opportunities I afforded him to contrast sybaritic luxury at ten A. M. with the unequivocal approach of bankruptcy at ditto P. M."

"We always tried to do our best for him," Mrs. Dickens agreed. "Though I still think he would have been wiser to stick to the last which James Lamert extended to him in the factory, and become a Midas about town."

"It is no light responsibility to have a genius for a son, but there are compensations. Cast an infant genius upon the

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waters, Elizabeth, and he shall bring you bread after many days in surprising quantities. Charles, in these natatory and graniferous respects as otherwise, is an indisputable genius."

"How do you define a genius, Mr. Dickens?" asked the doctor, entering and giving him a draft of medicine.

"A genius, sir," replied John, gratified by his interest, and not noticing his withdrawal, "is a human being—the sex is immaterial, and often indefinable—who does what has never been done before, and does it much better. With amazing fecundity of invention, my son has created an entire galaxy of memorable characters."

He stopped, with a burst of coughing.

Mrs. Dickens handed him a glass of water, and, after drinking it, he resumed.

"Nature, my love, like Newton, abhors a vacuum, and has most opportunely provided Charles with an appreciative audience. He has tapped a new public; he is read to-day in thousands of homes where books have heretofore been regarded with misgivings, as being associated with the tradesmen's accounts. While I have not always agreed with his somewhat sentimental opinions on social questions, it can not be denied that he has brought good tidings of great joy to the lower middle classes, and that these have, in return, acclaimed him as the champion of their hypothetical aspirations—often, I fear, unaspirated."

"If you talk so much, John, dear," said his wife, "you'll be exhausted by the time Charles comes."

"All the better, my love. I have detected a certain weakness, not to say a monotony, in his death-bed scenes. No one surpasses me in my respect for the intensity with which he makes his characters live, but I can not say the same for the manner in which he makes them die. The nearer, therefore, to the next world that I may chance to be when he arrives, the better I shall serve him as a model in this."

"You know how much you admire him. I have heard you say that he is a modern Savonarola, though how he resembles that sainted woman I never could understand."

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"I am all admiration, my own, at his ability to look on this picture and on that, with a most astonishing eye for eccentricities. But I do not conceal from myself that, for all his genius, he has unfortunate defects of character. I have often of late years been tempted to wish that, in holding a mirror up to nature, he would occasionally take a peep in it himself."

"He certainly looks very old for his age, and he's losing his hair, like a second Delilah."

"That was not altogether my meaning, Elizabeth. I allude less to the external deficiencies of his cranium than to an unmistakable internal swelling. He appears to be content that his admirers should ascribe to him all the unparagoned virtues of his heroes and his heroines, though he has, so far as I can see, only the slenderest claim to be pictured as a kind of midsummer Santa Claus in monthly parts. I might even in this connection echo the judgment of his favorite dramatist, Ben Jonson, upon Shakespeare, and confess that, while honoring Charles on this side idolatry as much as any, I can not imagine why he should be most praised for the very qualities in which he is deficient."

The doctor interrupted John's observations by bringing Charles into the room. He was hot and nervous; sick-rooms always depressed him.

His father greeted him affectionately, begging him to be seated.

"I gathered from your missive, my dear boy," said the invalid, "that you come from an assembly."

"A committee on fallen women, father."

"I, too, Charles, am falling, like an autumn leaf from the branches of the tree of life. A few last whirls and crackles in the wind, and I shall be shoveled away." He smiled. "What, if I may inquire, was the exact purpose of your committee?"

"We examined some unfortunate creatures to see if they were fit to emigrate to Australia," replied Charles, astonished at his father's cheerfulness.

"[To which incompletely surveyed continent, I recall, you

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also dispatched a certain Mr. Wilkins Micawber. Ah, a delicious figure of fun, Micawber!"

"Don't let's talk of him now!" Charles said hastily.

"From the first," said John, with a sly glance at his uncomprehending wife, "I recognized the exiled Wilkins as a fellow philosopher, and took an almost personal interest in his adventures. My present emigration, however, is likely to be even more extensive than his. I have sent for you, therefore, to crave a boon."

"What is it, father?"

"As you are aware, my dear Charles, I have never been in a position to lay up treasure on earth, corruptible by moth, creditors or other vermin. For the past five years, however, I have ceased to be a burden upon you. Will you extend your protection to your mother, when I am no longer in a position to provide for her?"

"She shall want for nothing."

With a sigh of relief, John closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Mrs. Dickens and Charles could not bring themselves to believe that he was still in danger. Even the doctor inclined to revise his former opinion, and told Charles that he could safely return to the country.

He went away, and, first assuring himself at Devonshire Terrace that his eight-months-old daughter, Dora, was gaining strength, took the train to Malvern.

John's rally was not maintained. Just as his eloquence had seemed to strengthen him, so he weakened in his sleep. He lay very quiet, drowsing between sleep and unconsciousness. At intervals he opened his eyes and followed Mrs. Dickens with an uncomprehending stare, as she moved about the room. Occasionally he stretched a wavering hand toward the glass of water on the table by his side, and she moistened his lips. Late in the afternoon he roused himself and beckoned her close to him. She leaned over the bed, and he accomplished the ghost of a chuckle.

"I am convinced, Elizabeth," he said, in a thick halting whisper, "that a golden opportunity awaits me just round the corner."

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She sent for Charles, who reached London at midnight, and hastened to his parents' home. John lay with closed eyes, his breathing stertorous and irregular, his face flushed to a deep unnatural red.

"How long has he been unconscious?" Charles asked.

"All the evening," his brother Fred replied. "He hasn't spoken since I came."

"Doesn't he take any nourishment?"

"Mother gives him a sip of water now and then. That's all."

"Look! He's waking!" said Charles, as John's breathing paused, and a slight movement of his arm ruffled the bed-clothes. But the movement ceased, and the hoarse breathing recommenced.

Charles sank into a chair. His mother sat by the doctor at the other side of the bed, sewing. Now that he knew John was dying, Charles felt compassion for his mother. The long antipathy relaxed. How had it arisen? Of course! She had wished to send him back to the blacking factory. That was cruel. He glanced at her lined, guileless face. No, not cruel—merely foolish.

How bravely she had faced the disasters of John's improvidence! How stubbornly she had struggled against poverty! How wonderfully, despite all, she had brought up her children!

Ashamed that he had hated her, sneered at her in his books, avoided her, he was ready to humble himself, to beg her forgiveness. He watched her stealthily. She caught his eye, and his old antagonism woke. She would not understand. Better not try! He rose and joined Fred by the door.

So the hours passed, till the dawn broke. Then a gurgling sound came from John's throat, and little bubbles of froth oozed from his lips. Mrs. Dickens wiped them gently away with a handkerchief, one of his own gaudy bandannas.

Charles watched the pulsations in the veins of John's throat become irregular, falter, cease.

"Is it the end?" he whispered, as if afraid that his father might overhear him.

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The doctor, with his ear pressed to his patient's heart, shook his finger as a sign that John still lived.

For fully thirty seconds the invalid lay silent. The others stood motionless round him. Then he drew a long gasping breath, louder even than before, and Charles sobbed with relief. But after a few choking gasps the silence returned. John's last debt was paid.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CHARLES returned sorrowfully to Malvern after his father's funeral and spent ten days with the sisters, till the unavoidable duty of presiding over the annual dinner of the General Theatrical Fund brought him back to London.

He drove from the railway station to Devonshire Terrace to pass half an hour with Dora, whose nurse informed him that the little girl was improving in health every day.

Reaching the banquet in a gay humor, he was met by Forster and Lemon and applauded by the company as he took his seat. When they were half-way through the dinner, Forster was called outside.

He returned with grave features, and pushed his plate aside.

"Is the Nabob's Charger off his feed?" Charles asked Lemon loudly. "Vee must provide him with a bran-mash to rewive his wanishing appetite."

Everybody laughed except Forster, who for once appeared not to relish his humor.

Charles was called upon to speak. He sprang to his feet, patted his waistcoat, stroked his hair and began in his usual confident fashion. They were gathered together, he declared, to bear testimony to the usefulness of an excellent institution, the aim of which was to benefit the whole theatrical profession. No actor was too humble to share in its charitable activities. He referred even, he explained, striking the jovial note expected of him, to such minor performances as the young man "in white gloves and ditto inexpressibles," whose chief duty is to listen to others' songs and shake hands between the verses, and the agile individual who, by hastily dashing behind the scenery and appearing again and again from the same door, represents in his single person the whole of a stage army.

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While the audience rocked with laughter, Charles became serious again. In tones quavering with emotion, he pictured the actor, stricken with private sorrow, coming from scenes of sickness, ay, even from death itself, to play his part on the stage.

"All of us, in our several spheres," he said, "have often to do violence to our feelings and hide our hearts in fighting this great battle of life, and in discharging our duties and responsibilities."

He smiled at their cheers. What a thing it was to have power!

Other speakers rose, and he listened, blissfully certain that none would outshine him. When the last toast had been drunk, he felt a tap on his shoulder.

"Come outside, Charles," said Forster. "Lemon and I have something to tell you."

"Vot's happened, as the wenerable archdeacon v'ispered v'en he——"

"Come!"

"We have bad news for you," said Lemon, when they reached the door. "Illness——"

"Who?—Georgy? The children? Kate?"

"Little Dora," said Forster, "has been taken ill again suddenly. I intercepted a message to you from Devonshire Terrace."

"I understand. You mean that Dora is dead?"

"She fell into convulsions and died almost immediately after you left her."

Charles hid his face in his hands.

"First my father, and now Dora," he moaned.

Lemon thrust a glass of brandy into his hand, while Forster patted his shoulder in silent sympathy.

"Take me home, both of you! Don't leave me alone; I mustn't be alone. My God, what a cruel coincidence! I pictured an actor coming before the public from a death-bed, and at that very moment my own poor babe lay dying!"

"Mrs. Dickens must be told at once," said Lemon, when they reached the house.

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"I can't go. I can't face the journey. You must go and tell her, Forster; and Lemon must stay with me."

Forster undertook to go to Malvern first thing next morning, and Lemon sat up through the night beside Charles.

Forster left London with a heavy heart. Charles' reluctance to accompany him confirmed his suspicion that husband and wife no longer lived in sympathy. What made his mission more difficult, he knew that Kate, ever since the preliminaries to the American journey, had resented his ascendancy over her husband.

She received him with her habitual reserve, and he broke the news to her. Her grief was less noisy but not less intense than her husband's. She reproached herself bitterly for leaving the child, and, during the whole journey to London, she rocked to and fro in a stupor of self-condemnation.

"She takes it terribly," Forster whispered to Georgina.

"Poor Kate," her sister replied sadly. "What can we do? She has become strangely unsettled lately.—Tell me, Mr. Forster, do you think Kate is quite like other women?"

"Whatever do you mean, Miss Georgina?"

"She seems so odd nowadays," she whispered. "She sits about and mopes. I find her staring at nothing; then suddenly she laughs and cries, and falls into hysterics."

"I have always thought her extremely well-balanced."

The young woman shook her head, perplexed.

"She frightens me. And I'm anxious when she's with the children. Poor mites, they can't make her out."

Kate was calm again when Charles, pale with prolonged weeping, greeted them in the hall. Forster saw their eyes meet, with a glance which was challenging, almost hostile. As Charles slowly mounted the stairs, she trembled, extending her hand in a hopeless gesture. A nervous laugh escaped her. Charles turned sharply; his eyes flamed and he made as if to speak, but, choking back his words, continued on his way. She burst into passionate tears, murmuring incoherent words, and fell into her sister's arms. Georgina, with a meaning look at Forster, sighed and led her away.

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Charles found relief from his double loss in the Devonshire House theatricals, a new Christmas book, and plans for another novel. The house in Devonshire Terrace had become hateful to him since Dora's death, and, its lease expiring, he searched for a new home.

This he found in Tavistock House, in a Bloomsbury Square, a larger and more expensive establishment than any that he had yet occupied. He personally supervised all the alterations, and spent a merry hour composing titles for a dummy bookshelf to mask a door in the library; among them were *Lady Godiva on the Horse*, *The History of a Short Chancery Suit* in many volumes, *The Books of Moses and Sons*, and *Jonah's Account of the Whale*.

Kate passed dismal months at Broadstairs, her only consolation the children.

They were growing up. Charley, the fourteen-year-old Etonian, declared himself a man already; Mamie was in her teens, and Katey nearly twelve; the five younger boys were all old enough to romp on the sands with Georgina, whose vigorous slimness Kate contrasted ruefully with her own figure, ruined by much child-bearing.

It was hardly surprising, she reflected, that the children preferred their youthful aunt to the weary, aging mother who, for a reason they could not be told, was so rarely able to join in their games.

She was pregnant again now, for the tenth time.

Charles too aged rapidly. Though he was only in the early forties, he looked much older. A fringe of beard—grown for a caprice, shaved off and grown again—added years to his appearance. His sparse hair was graying; lines and crow's-feet scored his face. The hard prominent veins on his temples heralded decay.

He began a new novel, *Bleak House*, writing again in the first person, but as a girl. Its first monthly part appeared just before Kate bore her seventh son.

The sales were very large, but a spiteful and easily recognizable portrait of his friend, Leigh Hunt, as Harold Skimpole angered the latter's acquaintances.

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"Your explanation that Skimpole resembles Hunt only in manner has done more harm than good," Forster reported. "Hunt's friends laugh at it as casuistry."

"Isn't my word good enough for 'em?"

"Apparently not," said Forster dryly. "I must confess that you have been rather injudicious. What do you propose to do?"

"Nothing."

"Could you not adopt the policy which was so effective when you unwittingly hurt that crippled seamstress acquaintance of yours in *Copperfield*? A few delicate touches later in the book transformed Miss Mowcher into a lovable character."

"I can't see any resemblance between the two cases. Then I was proud to right a wrong I had unconsciously done a woman. You know, I never for one instant thought that she'd see *Copperfield*. But if Hunt's gang think they can bully me into apologizing, they're badly mistaken."

He relieved his restlessness by traveling with friends to Rome, where he rejoiced to see Progress, in the shape of telegraph wires, piercing the heart of the pagan ruins of the Colosseum. He labored at his *Child's History of England* week by week; another novel, *Hard Times*, followed *Bleak House*.

Even so, he felt the need of new outlets for his energy. He spoke at meetings—welcoming workmen's institutes, praising charities, urging reforms, celebrating the entrance of England into the Crimean War as a blow struck for human advancement and freedom.

His keenest pleasure, however, lay in charity readings from his works, notably *A Christmas Carol*. The enthusiasm of his audiences increased his exasperation at the convention which forbade such readings for personal profit.

"Why the devil shouldn't I make money out of my readings?" he demanded of Forster.

"Because, my dear Charles, as I have already told you fifty times, it would prostitute you both as a genius and as a gentleman."

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"Humbug!" cried Charles, but accepted Forster's view. And all the time he contrasted his popular fame with his secret loneliness. He was the most admired author of the day; he could not enter a public place without recognition; strangers uncovered when they passed him in the street; his name was cherished to the very ends of the earth. But at home sat Kate, divided from him by every bar which separates one human being from another. He felt himself confronted by a stranger, cold, indifferent, independent.

She had now learned that she could have no more children, and the knowledge made her freer than she had ever dared to hope. Her taste for music revived, and she regularly attended concerts. She visited her parents and friends more frequently, made fresh acquaintances and invited them to her house. Charles, his circle and his moods, no longer comprised the total of her existence.

He resented this, first sullenly, then angrily. Kate was growing impossible! She was a continual exasperation to him, with her listless indifference, her new passion for gadding about, her inexplicable outbursts of hysterics. Their incompatibility was so glaring that, more than once, he was on the verge of proposing a separation. But he never uttered the dread word. How could he, when his public reputation might be shattered by such a revelation of domestic disunity?

He reached *Dombey and Son* down from its shelf, and turned sardonically to the passage where Mr. Dombey says, "Do you know who I am, Madam? Do you know what I represent? . . . People to say that Mr. Dombey—Mr. Dombey!—was separated from his wife! Common people to talk of Mr. Dombey and his domestic affairs! Do you seriously think, Mrs. Dombey, that I would permit my name to be handed about in such a connection? Pooh, pooh, Madam! Fie for shame! You're absurd."

Kate would be glad, of course, to be rid of him, to free herself from all her family duties. But she was much mistaken if she thought that he would allow her to go her own way. Bad enough that she was careless of his feelings; she

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should never be permitted to throw off her responsibility to his children!

Why, why on earth, had he married her? If he had waited a year or two, he could have married Mary. Had he waited a dozen years, Georgina might have been his—Georgina, who was Mary's second self, Georgina, who sustained him with her health-giving presence, Georgina, whom the children adored, Georgina, who was sacrificing her whole life to atone for Kate's shortcomings.

He worked himself into a paroxysm of self-pity. Little did his public guess what a cross he had to bear, to gladden them with his *Carol* philosophy of optimism and good cheer!

One morning he sat at his desk, reading *David Copperfield*. Half his post lay unopened before him; he left to his secretary all letters of which he did not recognize the handwriting. One of these envelopes, however, caught his attention. Surely he had seen that writing somewhere? He picked it up and gazed at the address with an effort of memory. Suddenly he thrilled; it was the hand of Maria Beadnell!

Ripping open the envelope, he extracted the letter, but for a long time he could not bring himself to unfold it. The meetings in the shadow of Saint Paul's; the walks together; the secret troth; the bitter-sweet agony of that first love! Maria's beauty rose up before him, her charm, her vivacity, his heart-broken grief when she jilted him.

Mastering his emotion, he began to read. He smiled at the untidy writing, the old disregard for spelling and punctuation, the underlinings and inverted commas which reflected every modulation of her voice.

Maria wrote that she felt she *had* to "get in touch" with him again, that she was "*marred*" and the mother of two girls, that she was *so* glad to know him "faymous and successful." It was her *dearest wish* that they might meet again. Did he "sontimes" think of her? She often looked back on the past, and it "seemed like yesterday."

Charles read the letter again and again, tears in his eyes. His first impulse was to call the sisters, but he checked himself.

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Was Maria much changed? She must be in the forties now, older even than Kate. But some women preserved their looks, and Maria had always been a beauty. What a coincidence that, after all these years, she should suddenly enter his life again, at the very moment when his heart was empty and joyless!

How should he reply? He tore up several attempts, amused that he, a practised author, should taste again his difficulties as a love-sick boy.

Finally he told her that he was enchanted with her letter, though the mention of her daughters had made him jealous till he remembered that he had nine children of his own. He was off to Paris in the morning for a fortnight, but, on his return, he would ask his wife to call on her and her husband, and arrange a quiet dinner where nothing should disturb their recollections of old times.

He thought of her all that day, but did not mention her to the sisters. Her image haunted him on the journey; he seemed to recognize, in every woman who passed, the trim little figure whom he used eagerly to await beside the wall of the Cathedral.

So intense became the illusion that he was relieved, more than surprised, to receive another letter from her in Paris.

She had been *so* pleased to receive his letter; his writing had not altered "in the least." It would be *wonderful* to meet again after "all these years." When was he coming back? She was so "*impatiant*" to see him.

Here was balm for his bruised feelings. Here was some one who really appreciated him, whose love for him shone in every syllable of her letters.

He seized a sheet of note-paper.

"My dear Maria," he wrote, but changed this to "My dear Mrs. Winter," telling her, however, how he had instinctively used her Christian name. Then he revealed his debt to her—the inspiration, the passion and the ambition which were the fruit of his love for her. He owed to her, he said, every single quality which had brought him fame. Had she not recognized herself in the Dora of *Copperfield*?

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She was a hard-hearted little woman to have treated him so cruelly in those dear dead days; never had he been so good a man, and never would he be again, as when he was her foolish, wretched lover.

He signed himself "Ever affectionately," and, stirred as he had not been for many years, sealed and posted the letter.

Returning to his hotel, he laughed at their changed situation. Once, Maria's journey to Paris had overwhelmed him with misery; now, it was he who traveled, and she who anxiously awaited his return.

Her answer lay on his desk when he arrived home at Tavistock House.

His fervor seemed to have surprised her. She confessed that she had grown toothless, *fat and ugly*, and he would *never* recognize her. And what would his wife think, she asked with a touch of the old coyness, if she "intercepted" one of their letters? She ended with the assurance that she was looking forward "*more than ever*" to their meeting.

Charles wrote immediately. Of course "My dear Maria"—he no longer hesitated at this familiarity—was not old and fat and ugly; he would not believe a word of it. Why not come to see him? If she cared to call at Tavistock House next Sunday between three and four in the afternoon, he would be at home—alone. It would be best, however, if she inquired first for Kate, and only then for him!

He hesitated. Suppose her husband saw the letter. Would it not look extremely odd—this assignation, and his instruction how to avert the servants' suspicions? But he decided that Maria would be discreet. He sent the letter.

Maria, unfortunately, was too discreet. She refused point-blank to pay him a clandestine visit, and reminded him of his earlier "suggestion" of a quiet dinner with her husband and Kate.

So, after all, there was to be no romantic tryst! Kate would have to be let into the secret.

"My dear," he said to her that afternoon with exaggerated nonchalance, "I've had a letter from my old flame—

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Maria Beadnell as was, Mrs. Winter as is. It appears that she's in London, and would rather like to meet us and have a chat about old times."

"Why not, Charles, if you wish it?"

Her tone peeved him by its listless indifference, but he forced himself to smile.

"I wonder if you would call and invite her and her husband to dine here next week. I think it ought to be as early as possible, because I may soon be busy with a new story."

"I can go whenever you like," she said.

"It's not when I like; it's when you like," he snapped.

"You have so many appointments these days."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I'll go the day after tomorrow, dear."

He waited impatiently, fretting with hopes which he dared not formulate.

"Georgy and I called on Mrs. Winter this afternoon," Kate told him a couple of days later. "They will dine with us next week."

"I suppose she's changed a lot?" he asked.

"You forget that I've never seen her before. I suppose she has." Kate sighed. "Like all of us."

"She's still handsome, though?"

"That's a matter of opinion."

Charles did not press his inquiries.

The delay jangled his nerves. He filled in the time by writing to the Middle Temple, which still proudly retained his name in its list of students, and demanding the return of the deposit money paid on his entrance sixteen years before. He explained that he had not foreseen that Literature would engross his whole time and prevent his reading for the Bar.

The day of the dinner came, and he watched the slow hours pass toward evening. Georgina ran in to show him how well she looked in the new dress of claret-colored silk which he had bought for her.

The bell rang, and she vanished down-stairs, grateful for his compliments.

Smiling at the recollection of his youthful dandyism,—

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how very odd his little military hat would look now!—he turned to his mirror to see that his clothes sat well and that his hair was neatly combed. He heard the visitors ushered into the house. Another minute, and he knew that the sisters were receiving them in the drawing-room. With a last glance in the mirror, he slowly descended.

He turned the handle of the door and entered, tense with emotion. A stout, middle-aged woman, arrayed in rustling red silk, her flagrantly dyed hair adorned with artificial roses, her fat face plastered with rouge and powder, bustled toward him.

"Oh, Charles," she tittered, "what a pleasure to see you again! You haven't grown an inch taller, and how funny you look with a beard! Do you think I'm changed? Of course, one does change, doesn't one? In appearance, I mean, for I'm sure one's nature never really alters, does it?"

This fat, smirking, red-silk horror was the joke which Fate had prepared for him, in mockery of his loneliness!

The shock made him poor company at dinner. He hardly raised his eyes from his plate and, contrary to his custom, made no effort to dominate the conversation.

Maria's husband, Louis Winter, was a meek, self-effacing creature, something between an unsuccessful business man and an uninspiring curate. He adored her, and she allowed him no share in the conversation.

"It's always been my dream," she told Kate, "to bring Piggie—you're Piggie, aren't you, Louis?—and Charles together, for I'm sure they'll appreciate each other so much. You mustn't mind my calling your husband Charles, my dear, because, you see, we were *such* intimate friends years and years and years ago, long before he ever saw you, though I'm sure I oughtn't to say that, ought I?"

"I know that he has been looking forward to meeting you again," said Kate.

"Isn't it *wonderful* to see a little boy whom one knew in one's childhood—or nearly in one's childhood—grown up into a really well-known man? It's just like a second childhood—isn't it, Piggie? There, he agrees with me, the dar-

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ling—and I'm told that Charles is famous all over the Continent, and even in America, unless one can call America part of the Continent. You went with him to America, didn't you, my dear?—Don't you wish *we* could go to America, Piggie? I'm sure you do.—And I suppose you took the children with you?"

"No, we left them behind in England," Kate answered.

"Charles tells me that you've *nine* babies. Isn't that wonderful?—Don't you wish we had nine blossoms, Piggie? Bless him, of course he does.—I know, from just having two, what *treasures* they are about the house and what sweet things they do and say, and how one's whole life is bound up with them. Perhaps I oughtn't to say it, but Charles was such a *strange* boy—wasn't he, Piggie? Oh, but, of course, you didn't know him. What a silly old woman I am!—What was I saying?"

"You were telling us about Charles when he was a boy," said Georgina eagerly.

"You know, Miss Hogarth, a lot of people didn't like him at all, though even pa had to agree that there was *something* about him that might turn out very well or very badly.—You remember, Piggie dear, don't you? I'm sure you do; you never forget anything—so isn't it a blessing that he's turned out so well, and really, it sounds a *dreadful* thing to say, but I've often thought that Charles might have grown up into a criminal, like a wife-beater or a garroter."

Her husband broke in anxiously. "My dear," he murmured, in a sepulchral voice.

"I know just what Piggie means, bless him! He's always so frightened that I'll say something I shouldn't. He's such an insight into human nature!—But I can see that it's been Charles' salvation to have such a charming and handsome and—yes, I *must* say it—such a loving wife. You'd never have thought—would you, Piggie? No, of course, you wouldn't; you're so innocent—that Mrs. Dickens was the mother of nine, except, of course, one's never quite the same afterward. I *do* hope, my dear, you know how to amuse Charles."

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"I do my best," said Kate.

"Of course you do, *and* keep him in order, for he was such a flighty boy, and I'm sure it was dreadfully easy to offend him, especially when he took himself so *seriously*."

"My dear," her husband warned her again.

"There! Isn't Piggie clever? Of course, you are!—Naturally there's no reason now why Charles shouldn't take himself seriously, when, as people say, Charlie's the world's darling, even in America, and quite the family man. But I mustn't tease him any more, though it *is* sweet of him to remember his little Maria—isn't it, Piggie?"

Charles abruptly pushed back his chair and strode from the room.

The Winters looked at each other. Kate sent Georgina to inquire what was amiss, and the girl found her brother-in-law pacing his study in a fury.

"Tell 'em I'm ill; say I've been called away to the printers; say anything—but, for heaven's sake, don't make me listen to any more of that infernal woman's babble!"

"I'm so sorry, Charles," she said contritely. "It was inconsiderate of us to invite her here."

She returned to the dining-room to make apologies for him. Kate invented the excuse that he suffered from sudden attacks of neuralgia, which caused him to break off whatever he was doing.

As if the shock of her changed appearance were not enough, Charles discovered that Maria had no intention of permitting their intercourse to cease. She wrote to him, assuming—as well she might, from the tone of his letters before the dinner-party—that he was eager to strengthen their renewed friendship.

He wished never to see her again, but this was made difficult by the sisters taking a liking to the good-natured woman.

They had almost to force him to accompany them on the formal return visit to her house, where she introduced him to the stuffed remains of Daphne, the spaniel. To her letters he either did not reply at all, or returned frigid regrets at the

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improbability of his being at home when she called. Why could she not realize that he loathed the sight of her?

She reproached him with wishing to avoid her. He sent an evasive denial, explaining that he retained his inventive powers only by subordinating himself to them, and that, so fragile was his hold upon his genius, he dared not tie himself to any engagement, lest the foreknowledge of it upset a whole day's work.

Wrote Maria with a last fling of archness, "I suppose, dear Charles, that an engagement with an Unknown Fair between three and four on *Sundays*, when dear Kate *is not at home*, does not upset your work so terribly as when a silly fat old woman wants to come and *gossip*."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

CHARLES soon discovered a way to revenge himself for the disappointment which Maria had caused him. Just as he had idealized his memories of her as Dora in *Copperfield*, so he would caricature her in his next novel as Flora Finching, a blowsy widow endeavoring to foist herself upon a reluctant suitor of her youth.

He began to picture situations for her faded skittishness, and jotted down notes as they occurred to him:

Still madly in love with him. Can't understand that all over between them.

Tricks him into putting arm round her on dark staircase.

"Don't breathe a word to Pa."

Tries make assignations with him. "You won't be walking in Gray's Inn Gardens four o'clock to-morrow?"

Drinks heavily. BRANDY IN TEA!

With this spur to his invention, he set to work on a draft of the story, for the title of which he hesitated between *Nobody's Fault* and *Little Dorrit*. He meant to expose flunkeyism, the world's exaggerated kotowing to rank and wealth. As a topical touch, he would satirize (through the "Circumlocution Office") the inefficiency of Government departments, to which attention was being drawn by the Crimean War scandals. To enliven a tangled plot, he marshaled his usual gallery of eccentrics.

Ideas came slowly, till an unexpected incident stimulated him.

He burst one evening into the lodgings at Folkestone where he had taken his family, and cried to the sisters, "My Gad's Hill house is for sale!"

"Your what?" asked Kate.

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"The house on Gad's Hill which I've coveted all my life."

"And now you're going to buy it, Charles?" said Georgina, clapping her hands.

"Or perish bankrupt in the attempt, Georgy! It's another of those amazing coincidences which single me out from all the world.—Oh yes, Kate, you needn't look superior."

"Charles!"

Estranged though they were, he still held the power to wound her.

"Oh, I know," he went on, "that *you* don't believe in my coincidences! But Georgy knows better. Listen, Georgy! I carried my trusty *Household Words* secretary down to Rochester yesterday on business; in the afternoon we tramped round Gad's Hill, and I showed him the house. We took the train back to town; he went to a dinner-party, and this morning he comes up to me and says, 'Chief, the lady I took down to dinner last night owns that house on Gad's Hill, and she wants to sell it.' You could have knocked me down with a feather."

"What will you do?" Georgina asked.

"What have I done already, you mean. I've set Mitton to find out particulars and prices. It's one of the most extraordinary things that have ever happened to me."

He sat down, mopping his face.

"Lord, the memories that house holds for me!" he said. "Why, over thirty years ago I promised little Lucy Stroughill at Chatham, sitting under the tea-table with her, that, when she and I were married, we'd go and live in it."

"Is that the woman who dined with us at Rochester last year?" asked Kate. "The slim faded woman with the doctor husband?"

Her comment was innocent, but Charles stole an uneasy look at her, wondering if it was a covert sneer at his disillusionment with Maria. He pretended not to hear, but she repeated her question.

"Yes, she was Lucy," he replied gruffly. Already Kate had blunted the edge of his joy!

He shut himself in his study, with the draft of his novel

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before him. How on earth could one write with such a woman beside one, damping all one's enthusiasms, raking up one's disappointments, stifling one with her antipathy? If only his work would allow him to escape from her—to a desolate village on the French seashore, to Spain, to the Alps, anywhere.

He turned the pages of his manuscript, read a few paragraphs, corrected a phrase, inserted another, began an article for *Household Words*, and forgot his worries in the thrill of creation.

But at supper Kate faced him again, silent, inscrutable, inevitable. Anything not to have her reproachful eyes constantly before him, boring into his soul, reading his thoughts! He transferred the household to Boulogne in the autumn, left her there with the children and went to Paris with Georgina to find quarters for the winter.

It was his first protracted journey alone with his sister-in-law. How cheering was her company, how pleasant her smiling indifference to discomfort, her relish in being near him, her anxiety to save him all worry, to soothe and ease his troubled brain!

A hundred little attentions showed her admiration. She folded the newspaper so that his eye fell upon the translation of his own work in it; she warned house-agents and tradesmen that they were dealing with a world-renowned author. These days together threw a delightful enchantment round the apartment which he chose in the Avenue des Champs Élysées. Even Kate's arrival could not wholly dispel it.

He divided the winter between work on *Little Dorrit*; trips to London to attend to *Household Words*; and improving his acquaintance with the literary and artistic lions of Paris.

"Vell, if she ain't a holy terror!" he exclaimed, as he drove away with the sisters from a dinner with George Sand.

"She is pleasant and kindly," said Kate, on whom his patronizing sneers at fellow writers grated.

"I believe you! Europe's first-prize-vicked-old-wampire of a blue-stocking is werry 'pleasant and kindly,' ain't she?"

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To quote the immortal Mrs. Gamp, 'Who deniges of it, Betsey?' I'll tell you whom the old girl reminds me of—the queen's monthly nurse!"

"Charles! Really!" tittered Georgina.

"What a contrast between her and Madame Scribe!" he said. "No wonder old Scribe makes so much money with his plays! Why, his wife must be older than you, Kate, yet her figure's every bit as good as Georgy's. If I weren't a model stepbrother, I'd say it was better!"

"Isn't it odd, Kate," said Georgina, "how Charles always confuses stepsisters and sisters-in-law?"

Kate turned her face away, but he saw tears gathering in her eyes.

"Now what on earth's the matter?" he asked. "You're not jealous of Madame Scribe, are you?"

"No, Charles; of course not."

"Well, then—what's the matter?"

"I don't know," murmured Kate. "I suppose I'm not very well. Don't pay any attention to me!"

She went to bed as soon as they reached their apartment. Georgina begged Charles to read her his latest pages of *Dorrit*, peeling with laughter at the new absurdities which he had contrived for Flora Finching.

"You've hit Maria off perfectly, Charles," she commented. "I wish I'd known at the time that she was setting her cap at you."

"She won't catch me, though!" he rejoined. "I'm a good stepbrother-in-law, I am!"

Wilkie Collins, a regular contributor to *Household Words*, arrived in Paris and was accommodated in a neighboring house. A pale, spectacled young man of thirty, who had abandoned the Bar for authorship, his usefulness to the magazine endeared him to Charles. Kate found his excessive untidiness tiresome. She bore with it, for the children loved him; but his constant presence in the house added to the difficulties of housekeeping. He and Georgina gave Charles the admiring audience which he demanded, and Kate felt herself thrust yet farther away.

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"Gad's Hill will be mine in a few weeks now," Charles informed the sisters and Collins on his return from a flying visit to London. "I drew a check for seventeen hundred odd pounds for it last Friday,—everything always happens to me on a Friday, Georgy, as you know!—and Letitia's husband, Henry Austin, has already been down to see about the alterations."

"It's a great deal of money, Charles," said Kate.

"Yes, I meant to speak to you about that. The alterations are going to cost much more than I thought, so you'll have to go slow for a while. You really must cut down your expenses; you've become very extravagant again."

To chide her before Wilkie Collins was intolerable.

"I have never been extravagant, Charles," she said.

"Oh, yes, my dear, you have. Very extravagant!" he replied blandly. "You must keep a sharper eye on the bills. And, oh Georgy, I've got such a surprise for you. What do you think Forster's bin an' gone an' done with his precious self?"

"How can I know?" she giggled.

"The old boy's bin an' gone an' got engaged! Engaged! The Lincolnshire Mammoth engaged! And to a vidder! He's going to marry Colburn the publisher's vidder. Lor', how I chaffed him! 'Sammy,' I says to him, werry sewere, 'Sammy, my boy, haven't I told you to bevare o' vidders? Sammy, my boy,' I says, 'fancy you, arter all these years, a-deceewin' your old friend the Sparkler and takin' up with a vidder!'"

"How could you be so cruel!" said Kate.

"He didn't half get red in the face, Georgy, I can tell you. Svelled up, he did, till I thought he'd bust all the buttons off his precious frock coat. 'I do not think, my dear Dickens,' he said—you know his pompous tone, Collins,—'that this is a becoming spirit in which to view my betrothal.' 'No more don't I think,' I answers him back, 'that an old hemperor of your years and avwardupwar shows a becoming spirit in a-marryin' of a publisher's vidder, vot's grown rich with robbin' poor authors. All vidders is bad, but publishers'

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vidders is vorst of all. Still,' I says, making him waxier than ever, 'I s'pose for a lit'ry feller like you to marry a publisher's vidder is a little bit o' fat for both of you.' "

"What did he say to that, Charles?" asked his admiring sister-in-law.

"Oh, he just rubbed his forehead, as if he was puzzled, and stalked out of the room. What's more, he wouldn't dine with me next evening, the fussy old Leviathan. I don't want to puff you up with sinful pride, Collins me boy, but, in my humble opinion, a certain person whose name I won't mention—he's a lit'r'y cove vot's about to be married—is just a leetle teeny weeny bit jealous that a rising young writer, who also shall be anonymous, is seeing too much of a Distinguished Author, whom modesty forbids me to describe."

"I should be very sorry to offend Mr. Forster," said Collins. "He has always shown me great kindness."

"Oh, he came round again, all starch and smiles, before I left London. His tantrums always blow over, don't they, Georgy? Besides, he thinks the world of *Dorrit*; he told me that Flora Finching was 'Irresistible, my dear Dickens, a piece of kindly and tender humor.' And, mark you, he's never even met Maria!—Believe me, Collins, he don't want to lose touch with Dickie, the Distinguished Author."

They moved back to Boulogne, where three of the boys were at school. Charles invited all his friends over from England. Wilkie Collins was lodged in a pavilion in the garden, and ate his meals with them. Mary Boyle came, and the farce of the good-night kiss between "Meery" and "Jo" was daily reenacted. She and Georgina were ever by his side; they never seemed to tire of his conversation and his jokes. He insisted on playing host to every admirer and hanger-on who found the way to the villa.

It was only a temporary relief for Kate when, after an epidemic of diphtheria broke out in Boulogne, she carried the children back to London, leaving Georgina to keep house for Charles and Collins.

They soon followed, and Charles turned Tavistock House

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upside down with preparations for a production of Collins' new play, the *Frozen Deep*. He presided over everything. He rehearsed players, and calling himself the "Gas Boy," the "Gaslight Boy" or simply "Young Gas," superintended the gas-fitters, the carpenters, the painters, the tailors, even the dressmakers.

Kate's servants were distracted by the uproar; the children fell into paint-pots and glue-pots, and delighted to play with sharp chisels; an army of appetites clamored for food. She knew that it would have been easier, cheaper and better to produce the play in a theater, but Charles' vanity was set on performing it in his own home.

The first performance of the *Frozen Deep* took place on Twelfth Night, in celebration of Georgina's and Charley's birthday and the latter's entrance into Baring's Bank. The production continued at intervals for a fortnight, when at last the stage was dismantled and Charles transferred his energy to the alterations at Gad's Hill.

He carried off the sisters to see how well these were proceeding, and told them to be ready to move there in the summer.

His preoccupation with the *Frozen Deep* and Gad's Hill set him in arrears with the final monthly parts of *Little Dorrit*. He sat at his desk one April afternoon, desperately attempting to catch up, when a burly form cast a shadow over his papers.

"How's the Inimitable this afternoon?" roared Lemon. "I'm going to take him out."

"If you ain't outside this blessed house immediate, I'll call a constable."

"Ha, ha, ha! Then I shall just lie down on the floor, and ten constables couldn't move me."

"What's the spree, Mark?"

"Have you forgotten that young Talfourd's *Atalanta* comes off to-night? There's a box waiting for us at the Haymarket."

"If I didn't love you like a brother, Mark——"

"But you do; so off with care and on with your hat!"

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Young Talfourd's wild to have you at his first night; he says that you'll ensure success."

"I suppose I mustn't disappoint him," said Charles, impressed by this argument. "His father was a friend of mine. I dedicated *Pickwick* to him."

"And now for dinner," cried Lemon, smacking his lips.

"Shall us go to the Athenæum? All among the bishops and the thousand and vun humbugs?—No, let's go to my other club, the Garrick, v're the Gas Boy meets his fellow Crummleses!"

The play was typical of the light pieces of the day—a classical extravaganza in heroic couplets, full of topical allusions and puns. The two friends missed the opening scene, but roared with laughter at the next, to the admiration of the pit.

"Mrs. Jarman's daughter's playing to-night," said Lemon. "No sooner does the mother retire from the stage, than a daughter rises like a phoenix from the footlights."

"I don't see her name on the program," said Charles.

"There it is—'Ellen Ternan.' Mrs. Jarman's married name is Ternan. The child's playing the hero. Egad, here she comes!"

A dismal little person, shrouded in a cloak, crept upon the stage. Her voice did not carry even to the boxes.

"Bless my soul, Mark," cried Charles. "The chit can't even speak her lines!"

"Ain't it odd? You've heard of Mrs. Jarman's stage fright at her London début? I'm blessed if her daughter hasn't caught the same complaint."

The girl struggled to the end of the scene.

"Too bad for Talfourd, to have his play let down by a ninny!" said Charles.

"Let's console him!" Lemon suggested, and took Charles behind the scenes.

Talfourd was not there, but an agitated stage manager appealed to Lemon for sympathy. Miss Ternan, he said, had rehearsed like an old hand; yet, at the critical moment, she had collapsed.

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"Why, there she is!" Lemon cried, pointing to a dejected figure in the wings. "Let's go and put heart in her!"

She shrank from them.

"Come, Ellen, my dear," boomed Lemon, "don't be frightened of us! I've known your mother since you were so high, and this is Mr. Dickens, the famous author."

"*The* Mr. Dickens?"

"That's the feller," said Lemon. "Come, you've nothing to weep about. Just a touch of nervousness—everybody goes through it. Pull yourself together for the next scene, and you'll bring the house down."

"Oh, Mr. Lemon, I can't," she sobbed.

"Can't? There's no such word!"

"Softly, Mark, softly; you're only upsetting her more. Go away and leave her to me! That's right.—Now, my dear child, tell me why you're weeping. Perhaps I can help you."

She looked up at him, her eyes drowned in tears.

"I'm—I'm so ashamed!"

"Ashamed, my dear? Why are you ashamed?"

"These clothes," she murmured, embarrassed.

"Stand up, and let me have a look at you!" he laughed.

"What's the matter with your clothes?"

The girl hung her head.

"I've never worn tights before, and I don't feel nice in them with all those people looking on."

"It isn't clothes that count in this world, my dear child," Charles declaimed. "It's what's inside 'em. If you were deformed or ugly, you might well blush to be seen in tights, but a young person so well-made and modest as yourself has nothing to be ashamed of."

"Do you really think so, Mr. Dickens?"

She gazed at him gratefully, and he patted her shoulder.

"Of course, I think so," he replied. "Now dry your eyes and play the rest of your part in the full confidence that your costume becomes you as sweetly as your modesty!"

"You *are* kind," she sighed.

Warned that the curtain was about to rise, he squeezed her hand encouragingly and went back to the box.

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"What a lovely child," he said, "and as pure, I swear, as she is beautiful!"

"Trust the old Jarman for that!" laughed Lemon. "She's as strict as any Society mamma."

"Stricter, I hope," rejoined Charles. "Ah, here comes little Ellen again. I do believe I've given her new courage. Yes, look! She's standing up to her part, and speaking her lines as if they meant something. What a perfect little creature!"

"I've seldom seen a more voluptuous figure," Lemon agreed.

"That is not what I meant," said Charles severely.

He clapped loudly, and the rest of the audience took its cue from him.

After the performance Lemon led him to the greenroom and introduced him to Mrs. Jarman. The famous old actress, magnificent in black silk and Maltese lace, received him graciously, while her daughter, free of her detested tights and charming in a blue cloak and dainty straw bonnet, hovered round him.

"Mr. Dickens was so kind to me, mamma," she said. "If it hadn't been for him, I should have died of shame and fright."

"Your daughter's delicacy equals her beauty, ma'am."

"Never forget, my dear Ellen," said Mrs. Jarman, "that on the night of your first appearance in London, you were visited by Mr. Charles Dickens, the greatest author of our time!"

"I shall always remember his goodness," Ellen declared, smiling at him.

"I'll send you a copy of *Pickwick* to-morrow, Ellen, to seal our friendship," he said, and gave her his usual farewell. "God bless you!"

Next day her image came between him and his work. His thoughts dwelled increasingly on her beauty, her innocent charm, her gratitude. The spring sunshine increased the ferment of his mind.

In the evening he walked half unconsciously toward the

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Haymarket and, with a sense of Fate, made his way to the greenroom.

He determined to introduce Ellen to his home, but it was with a qualm of uneasiness that he spoke to Kate.

"I want you," he said, "to call on a new friend of mine—Mrs. Jarman, the actress—and ask her to dine."

"With pleasure," Kate replied. "I've heard so much about her from Catherine Macready."

"Here's her address." He handed her a slip of paper. "And, by the way, tell her to bring her daughter Ellen. I think Georgy and the girls would like her."

Mrs. Jarman was flattered by the invitation.

Charles, as usual, monopolized the conversation. Afterward he persuaded Ellen to sing, to Georgina's accompaniment. He exerted himself to be charming, gay and attractive.

"What a delightful pair!" he exclaimed, when he and Kate were alone.

She raised her eyebrows. "The mother seems a pleasant enough woman," she said. "I had no opportunity to judge the daughter; *you* held her attention!"

He quivered with exasperation.

"What effort did you make to entertain her?" he demanded. "All the time I was talking to the old lady, I saw the poor girl sitting neglected."

"That's absurd, Charles," she retorted, flushing with anger.

"Don't try to excuse yourself! You know you're jealous, ridiculously jealous of her good looks and her youth, just as you are of Georgy."

She bent her head to examine a ruffled flounce of her dress.

"In that case," she replied, "I hope that you will entertain your young women friends alone in future, without insisting on my presence."

The gentleness of her voice hid for a moment the sting of her words. He repeated them to himself, and gasped at her audacity.

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"You must be taking leave of your senses, Kate. Did I understand what you said?"

"I hope so."

He stared at her, incredulous, as she calmly smoothed her dress.

Piqued by what he supposed to be Kate's jealousy, his infatuation with Ellen increased. He allowed himself to be seen with her, evening after evening, at the theater; he walked and drove with her; he praised her to playwrights and managers. Very soon it was whispered in greenrooms, dressing-rooms and taverns that "Dickens has taken up little Ellen Ternan."

This new interest did not hinder his completing the alterations to Gad's Hill. Proudly he watched the furniture arrive and, in his shirt-sleeves, disposed it in the rooms, unpacked his books, directed the gardeners in making a croquet-lawn and set the wine-cellar in order. He had made extensive purchases: dozens of dozens of bottles of sherry, brandy, port, claret and champagne. He hung the pictures, attaching a humorous inscription to one in the hall that visitors were not expected to admire it. With Georgina to help him, he tastefully arranged the curtains and cushions, and set out the familiar ornaments on his desk under the study window.

To have established himself at Gad's Hill crowned his ambitions. Nothing in his life demonstrated so solidly how far he had lifted himself from the blacking factory and the Marshalsea.

If only Kate were not perpetually before him! If he could rid himself of the whole taint of domestic failure which her presence symbolized! He had found a solution for every problem in his career except this ghastly incompatibility. He had vanquished poverty, obscurity, lack of education, censure and detraction. But, so long as Kate remained in his home, he could not taste repose, or know the full happiness of wealth and success.

Hans Andersen, the Danish writer of fairy-tales, was his first guest at Gad's Hill, a tall ungainly oddity with thin

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sprawling limbs and an enormous aquiline nose. He wore high collars to hide his scraggy neck, and wide loose trousers to conceal his spidery legs, which ended in feet so huge that his boots had to be especially made for him. He shambled everywhere after Charles, breathing delight and admiration. But he ruined everything by confiding his praise of Kate to his host.

"She is so gentle, so motherly," he repeated, till Charles sickened at his murmuring approach.

The glamour of the new house faded. Charles' appetite for change reawoke. Pleading *Household Words* business, he hurried to London and, inevitably, to Ellen.

On this visit he learned that Douglas Jerrold, the writer, had died suddenly, leaving small provision for his dependents. Charles conceived a plan to raise funds for them, and announced a series of performances of the *Frozen Deep* and readings by himself of *A Christmas Carol*, despite the protests of Jerrold's son that his endeavors were superfluous, and financial aid unnecessary.

He knew that the rehearsals and performances would cause him to spend many weeks away from home, and he looked forward pleasurably to the traveling, the merry supper-parties, the applause. Georgina would accompany him to act in the London performances; Ellen could play where professional actresses were needed. Thus one or other of the two young women, in whose lively, adoring company his cares vanished, would always be at his call.

He presented the *Frozen Deep* in London with greater success than he dared to anticipate. The Queen attended a special performance, and brought with her the Prince Consort; their son, the Prince of Wales, a bored youth of thirteen; his brother, Prince Alfred; the king of the Belgians, and a whole bevy of German Royalties.

Less ceremonial but even more gratifying to Charles were his two readings of the *Carol*. The awed hush, the laughter, the sobs and cheers of his audience quickened his old desire to appear regularly before his public as the interpreter of his own creations.

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Kate was occupied during these weeks in preparing Walter, her second son, for his journey to India. He was sixteen, and Charles had secured him a cadetship in the military forces of the East India Company.

"This terrible mutiny in India frightens me," Kate sighed to her sister. "How can I let Walter go there?"

"Charles says that he'll be perfectly safe. Why aren't you satisfied?"

She would be lonely at Gad's Hill when he went. Charley was no longer with her; he remained in London to be near the bank. Three of the other boys continued at school in Boulogne, and the two youngest and the girls seemed happier in Georgina's company than in hers. She missed the concerts and the musical society of London, and the companionship of her mother and her friends; since Charles professed dislike of her acquaintances, she dared not invite them to Gad's Hill, even in his absence.

When Walter sailed, Charles and Charley went to Southampton to see him off, but Kate was left in the country.

Then Charles went to Manchester to produce the *Frozen Deep* and a farce, *Uncle John*. In the latter he acted an old man of seventy who brings up a fatherless girl, Eliza, and falls in love with her. Ellen played Eliza.

He returned full of his triumphs, but a few hours with Kate embittered his mood, and he set off with Wilkie Collins on a tour of the Lake District.

When they moved back to Tavistock House for the winter, Charles spent his days preparing a collected edition of his work. Kate rarely saw him, except when he brought a party of friends to dinner.

Her mother warned her of the rumors which coupled Charles' name with Ellen, but Kate affected to dismiss them as mere gossip. She did not doubt that his infatuation with the graceful little actress was, in the worldly sense, innocent; but his choice of Ellen as a companion, to her own exclusion, shocked her.

Yet he knew neither peace nor content in London. Ellen's society consoled him in some degree for his unhappiness at

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home, but the girl could not follow, far less unravel the tangle of his emotions. Night after night, unable to sleep, he paced the streets, talking with policemen, cabmen, watchmen and the human wreckage which drifted through London between midnight and dawn.

For once he arranged no theatricals at Christmas; even these had palled. His only pleasure was at a party given to celebrate Charley's coming-of-age.

"What a little woman Mamie's become!" he said to Forster, pointing to the girl in her pretty white dress trimmed with pearls.

"She resembles Miss Georgina very much," replied Forster. "I was remarking upon that to my wife only a minute ago."

"Ah," Charles sighed, "how much more she resembles another aunt—the dear Mary whom you never knew, whose name she bears!"

Forster coughed. Like Charles' other friends, he had wearied of the Mary legend.

"She has much of your quickness of mind and manner," he said.

"In short," laughed Charles, "she's the ideal combination of charm and vivacity, eh?—Yes, I'm proud of the way she takes her place in my home. She and Georgy are inseparable; they manage everything between them."

How lively, how full of promise the children were! Charley was a man, earning his living, though he had lately alarmed his father by confessing that he had "no taste for banking." Katey walked past, still a child but proud of her first evening dress. Walter was in India. Francis, Alfred and Sydney were lusty schoolboys, a little too boisterous perhaps when Charles wished to work. Harry was out of the nursery; and even Edward, the baby, had been allowed to stay out of bed for the occasion.

Forster glanced at Charles sadly. The drooping figure, decked out so gorgeously, looked pathetically shrunken and worn; the face was lined, weary, hard, with hectic red patches at the cheek-bones—the face of an old man.

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As if conscious of his friend's thoughts, Charles jumped up and, darting across the room, dragged the portly Lemon into a wild game of leap-frog with the boys.

He continued his search for the key to his troubles. Why on earth should he not defy convention, and give a series of paid public readings? It would keep him constantly traveling, bring him enormous profits, allow him to spread his message among tens of thousands, whose applause would drug his discontent. It would provide all the thrill and satisfaction of creative work, without the wearisome travail.

He turned once more to the task of convincing Forster. The latter perceived that further opposition would weaken his power with Charles and, after long arguments, he gave a reluctant consent. Charles instantly closed with a firm of lecture organizers for an extensive and highly profitable tour in the summer. It remained only to announce his intention to Kate.

"I've decided to embark on a new enterprise," he told her. "I'm going to give public readings all over England this summer."

She set down her embroidery.

"And I and the children——" she began.

"Will go to Gad's Hill." His tone was brusker than he intended.

"While you travel round the country?"

"Certainly. I've arranged to go. It's all settled."

Her mouth set. "Do you think that I shall be content to be cooped away there, while you——" She caught her breath, goaded at last to reveal her pain. "Charles, Charles," she cried, "do you imagine I don't know that you invent every possible excuse to go and see Ellen Ternan?"

"Ellen Ternan! You're raving, Kate!—Do you doubt my faithfulness?"

"What do I care if you're faithful or unfaithful? I am degraded by your neglect of me."

She sobbed hysterically. He paced the room, protesting, gesticulating.

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"This is ridiculous," he said. "This jealousy! You know my nature, Kate. You know that I can't work without cheerful company."

"What work are you doing, pray?"

His face darkened.

"My God! Is there no limit to your folly? You must be mad to suspect me."

"Perhaps I *am* mad, Charles. Perhaps I have been driven mad. Ten children——"

"Who has looked after the children?" he sneered.

"Who, indeed?"

"I'll tell you," he replied. "I've always shrunk from hurting your feelings, but now you compel me to speak. The same devoted self-sacrificing woman to whom I owe what little happiness I have enjoyed in these last years, has become a second mother to my children. Can you deny that Mamie prefers Georgy to yourself?"

"Mamie has been turned against me," she said, but he waved his hand scornfully.

"You told me just now, I believe, that your mind is unhinged. You were right.—And the younger children? Don't they too look to Georgy for the love and care to which Nature entitles them?"

"Do you wonder that they prefer a young active woman to an exhausted mother?—As you do?"

He flared out at her.

"Cant! Humbug! You're like all the rest. I'm weary of your hypocrisy!"

"And I, Charles, am weary of hearing you prate of cant and humbug and hypocrisy. Is there a meaner cant than your empty catchwords? You're the hypocrite: you, who boast your contempt for money, and break faith with every publisher! You, who preach charity, and pillory your parents and your friends in your books! You, who rant duty and faithfulness, and desert me for a painted actress!"

He shouted at her to be silent, but she confronted him passionately.

Her voice rose. "You shan't silence me now! Haven't I

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watched you, year after year? Selfish, grasping, vulgar, vain—you nag me perpetually for extravagance, and lavish gifts on every toady. You play off your friends one against the other, and cast them aside when they've served your purpose——”

“You're mad, Kate, utterly mad! It's clear as daylight.”

“And *that* is humbug. You've postured so long that you deceive even yourself. Your father understood you, as your mother does. And so do I. You live in a fool's paradise of sycophants, with Georgina—poor simpleton—at its head.”

He hammered the table in a frenzy. “Enough! Enough, I tell you! Enough of this!”

“Gladly. Go to your actress! I know you through and through, and I despise you. Now you hear the truth about yourself—at last!”

“Kate, you're out of your mind. We've all noticed it—I and Georgy and Mamie, everybody. You've always neglected the children; you've been moody, hysterical, impossible.”

She swept his words aside.

“I've been too busy bearing you children to have time to neglect them. Can you guess what it's meant to me, year after year, to be awaiting another child, and then another, and another? *I* neglect the children? *I*? Charles, I can endure this life of ours no longer. This must be the end.”

Silence fell between them. Then he spoke, deliberately choosing his words.

“Since you wish to leave me, Kate, so be it!”

Striding to the door, he called Georgina. She was already in the hall.

“Charles! Kate! What's the matter, Charles?” she asked, looking from one to the other with large, frightened eyes.

Kate threw herself into a chair, her face hidden in her hands. Her husband cleared his throat nervously, avoiding Georgina's gaze.

“Kate and I have had an explanation, Georgy. She thinks it better that she should leave my house.”

Kate looked up, as if to speak, but buried her face again.

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"No one, Georgy," he went on, "knows better than I, how you have striven to avert this disaster. You foresaw it. You feared it. You warned me of Kate's derangement. Now I see it for myself. Between me and Kate everything is over."

There was silence once more, broken by Kate's sobs.

"What do you intend to do?" Georgina asked him, trembling.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I've thought it all out—I mean, I shall have to think it out."

He began to pace the room, planning, arranging, announcing.

"I shall provide for Kate generously. She shall have a separate establishment. Some one must live with her; her mental state makes that imperative. If she wishes, Charley shall join her. He's of age; let him learn something of the sacrifices we're all compelled to make for our parents! Or, of course, Georgy, if you wish to go with her——" He paused dramatically.

"And leave this house, Charles?" she faltered.

A smile flickered on his lips.

"Choose for yourself! You've devoted your young life to your sister's happiness. Will you go with her, or will you stay with me and continue your unselfish care of my little helpless children?"

"What can I say, Charles?" Georgina's voice was imploring. "What ought I to do?"

"You alone can decide, Georgy. Will you go with your sister—your sister who is deserting her home and her children?"

"Oh, Kate, Kate, it can't be true!"

Georgina dropped on her knees beside her sister, but her eyes did not leave Charles' face.

"Kate, you are making Charles very unhappy. Are you really going to leave him?"

Kate raised her head, despair in her swollen eyes.

"Yes," she said. "I shall leave him."

Georgina rose.

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"Then I must stay with you, Charles," she said soberly, "for the children's sake."

He caught her hand to his heart.

"You are the noblest woman who ever trod this earth of ours. You light up its darkness. God bless you, Georgy, for your love for the worse than motherless! Your sacrifice shall live for ever on their lips and mine."

He turned to Kate, addressing her in a chill exact voice.

"I am going to Paris to-morrow for a fortnight, to gather strength for the public ordeal before me. While I am away, you can take farewell of the children, if you can bear to face their innocent eyes."

She rose wearily, and climbed the stairs to her room, her face unsightly with weeping. Charles watched her mount, one hand posed on his forehead, the other clasping Georgina's.

"Poor, poor Charles!" Georgina murmured, as her sister passed out of sight. "How shall I break it to the children?"

* * *

Then twelve more years of fame, magnificence and acting, on and off the platform; and Charles Dickens died in 1870, an old man at fifty-eight.

The separation from Kate did not solve his discontent. His restlessness continued, and his vain efforts to appease it exhausted him and caused his death. Georgina was alone with him at Gad's Hill when he was struck down. Kate knew of his death from a newspaper-bill.

In the first days of their separation, Forster approached her with plans for a financial settlement. At her request, Mark Lemon acted for her, with the result that Charles severed friendship with him.

Charles agreed to allow her six hundred pounds a year, and to permit his eldest son to live with her. The other children might visit her, but they were not to meet her mother, whom he held responsible for her jealousy of Ellen Ternan.

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To justify himself with his public he printed a manifesto on the front page of *Household Words*, declaring the separation to be a friendly arrangement and denouncing all rumors which involved the names of other parties. He demanded that Bradbury and Evans should reproduce this in *Punch*, and, when they refused,—on the ground that *Punch* had no concern with his affairs,—he broke his contract with them and reverted to Chapman and Hall.

He was thus obliged to wind up *Household Words* and restart it under another title. The first he chose was *Household Harmony*. But, at Forster's instance, he changed this to *All the Year Round*.

He sent a letter to the manager of his reading tours to be shown to any person who wished to know the truth about the separation. Therein he declared that Kate had always neglected the children and had left his house under the influence of a mental disorder. Georgina wrote a similar letter to Maria Winter, in which she echoed his charges against Kate.

Kate never showed her pain at her husband's parade of his grievances, and, despite his treatment, she loved him to the end. When, by accident, he confronted her one evening in a theater, she burst into tears and drove home.

She followed the reports of his reading tours in the British Isles and America—to which "golden campaigning ground," as he called it, he returned a quarter of a century after his first visit. She read three more novels from his pen.

He left nearly a hundred thousand pounds. His will began with a bequest of a thousand pounds to Ellen Ternan, and of eight thousand pounds to Georgina, whom, with Forster, he appointed his executor and the guardian of his youngest children. To Kate he left a life interest in eight thousand pounds, with these words:

"I desire here simply to record the fact that my wife, since our separation by consent, has been in the receipt of an annual income of six hundred pounds, while all the great charges of a numerous and expensive family have devolved wholly upon myself."

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Upon whom else Charles expected these charges to devolve, remains a mystery; but his testamentary provision for Kate reduced her income by more than half.

Forster, with the aid of Georgina, fulfilled his promise to write Charles' biography. Therein he established the tradition that Charles, the Inimitable Boz, had ever shown himself in his life as in his work the uncompromising foe of cant, hypocrisy and humbug.

Kate still kept her silence.

THE END

NOTE

Charles' dream at Genoa, with its veiled Madonna, memories of his dead sister-in-law, etc., falls into a now well-defined category of dream symbolism. He had probably what is known to psychologists as a "mother-fixation." His unconscious childhood adoration of his mother produced, as its conscious effect, a revulsion from her. A corollary to this was his idealization of such unattainable women as Mary and Georgina, to the detriment of his wife. The hidden features of the Madonna in the dream, her recoil from his embrace, and the other details, all confirm this diagnosis, further discussion of which would be out of place here.

The effeminate streak in Charles' character is clearly shown in his fascination by abnormality and suffering, his visits to asylums, prisons, morgues and executions, his vanity, his foppery, his spiteful caricaturing of relatives and friends in his books, his facile tears and, of course, his obsession by the word "manly."

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